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Community Nonprofit and Small Business Partnerships - The Impact on Community Well-Being

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Tracye D. Bryant

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Community Nonprofit and Small Business Partnerships – The Impact on

Community Well-Being

by

Tracye D. Bryant

MPA, Strayer University, 2009

BLS, Mercer University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

In this study, the challenges impeding the establishment of sustainable partnerships between small businesses and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in South Fulton Georgia and their potential impact on community development were explored. Drawing upon existing literature and employing a qualitative research approach involving 10 community leaders from NPOs and 10 small business (SB) owners, the perceived barriers hindering successful partnerships were examined through thematic coding in NVivo. The findings revealed a range of obstacles including inadequate funding, limited financial capacity, divergent interests, uneven benefits, and challenges arising from the COVID-19 economic landscape. The study included insights into the potential for stronger partnerships through policy or programmatic changes, emphasizing the role of trust, commitment, and communication as pivotal factors in fostering successful collaborations. This research is significant, as it sheds light on avenues for small businesses and NPOs in South Fulton, Georgia to navigate barriers, improve sustainability, and drive social change through collaborative initiatives. The study's implications extend to community-based NPO leaders, SB owners, and managers, encouraging collaborative efforts to bolster community well-being and drive larger social change efforts. The study concludes with suggestions about the replication of similar research in diverse geographical contexts to expand empirical knowledge, promote positive social change, and glean broader insights applicable beyond South Fulton, Georgia informing strategies for fostering successful partnerships between small businesses and NPOs in other states and regions.

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Dedication

To my children, Avery, and Mason, you will always be my “why.”

Acknowledgments

The quote by Lao Tzu, “the journey of a thousand miles begins with one single step,” is among many quotes that I live by. For in this life journey, I have had many single steps, which ultimately led to continuing this journey God has put before me. I remember having a challenging time in my math class in high school, maybe in the 10th or 11th grade. At the time, I was like any other teenager with plans and aspirations to do the exact opposite with my life that would not warrant me needing high school math. While I always knew college was an option, I never thought it would be “my thing.” I wanted to entertain people and become a famous singer. But, when God has a path for you, it is for you. Fast forward, now decades later, and that young girl from “Atlannuh” who did not see college as the end of her journey will now possess the highest level of degree presented in a college setting. “Doctor,” that is. While the brief reminiscence of the story may not seem overly significant, it reminds me of the steps I have taken along this journey and the thousands of more miles yet to go. So, as I reflect, I am thankful to all who have played a part in this journey. While many are mentioned here, please know that I am not lost on the countless others who have prayed, cheered, supported, and encouraged me along the way.

First and foremost, I thank God for seeing in me more than what I saw in myself and for recognizing that He would use every talent and gift He gave me to do His will in the world.

To my mom, Wilma, thank you is not enough, but I hope this accomplishment brings you great pride and joy, knowing that over the years, I did listen, and I will always

use my platform to make the world a better place in your honor. I do not take for granted the responsibility and influence of knowing that I must lead by example.

To my children, Avery, and Mason, this is for you. Everything I do is for the two of you. I hope this will not only make you proud but also help you continue to pursue all that God has in store for each of you.

To my grandson, Armani, you were quite the surprise amid all of this, but God knew that you were the added motivation I needed to keep going. I work hard today so that your future will always be secured. Yaya loves you immensely.

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To my siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, family (like family), Women Connected Through Christ prayer group, City of South Fulton United Way Board of Directors, Southwest Airlines co-workers, friends, neighbors, associates, and everyone who has prayed for me, encouraged me, supported me, and believed in me, thank you. The best is yet to come.

“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” -Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Research Question.....	4
Theoretical Framework	4
Nature of the Study.....	6
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	9
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	11
Significance.....	12
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Introduction.....	14
Literature Search Strategy.....	16
Theoretical Foundation	17
Literature Review.....	23
NPO Structure.....	23

Small Business Structure	32
Small Business and Nonprofit Relationship	34
Organizational Structure	39
Sampling	48
Summary and Conclusions	50
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Research Design and Rationale.....	52
Role of the Researcher	54
Methodology.....	55
Participant Selection Logic	55
Instrumentation	57
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	58
Data Analysis Plan	59
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	60
Credibility	61
Transferability.....	61
Dependability	62
Confirmability.....	62
Ethical Procedures.....	63
Summary	63
Chapter 4: Results.....	65

Introduction.....	65
Setting.....	66
Demographics	66
Data Collection	70
Data Analysis	71
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	74
Credibility	74
Transferability.....	75
Dependability.....	76
Confirmability.....	77
Results.....	78
Theme 1: Inadequate Funding.....	79
Theme 2: Funding System Design	84
Theme 3: Lack of Financial Capacity among Small Businesses	86
Theme 4: Divergent Interests.....	87
Theme 5: Uneven Benefits.....	90
Theme 6: Hard Economic Situation in the Post-COVID-19 Period.....	92
Theme 7: Volunteering Strategy	94
Theme 8: Improved Community Well-being.....	95
Summary	98
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	100
Introduction.....	100

Interpretation of the Findings.....	101
Theme 1: Inadequate Funding.....	104
Theme 2: Funding System Design	104
Theme 3: Lack of Financial Capacity among Small Businesses	105
Theme 4: Divergent Interests.....	106
Theme 5: Uneven Benefits.....	107
Theme 6: Hard Economic Situation in the Post-COVID-19 Period.....	108
Theme 7: Volunteering Strategy	109
Theme 8: Improved Community Well-being.....	110
Limitations of the Study.....	112
Recommendations.....	113
Implications.....	114
Conclusion	116
References.....	117
Appendix A: Interview Questions	138
Appendix B: Invitational Email for Recruitment.....	139

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics	69
Table 2. Preliminary Codes.....	73
Table 3. A Summary of Study Themes.....	74
Table 4. Themes Applicable to Answering the Research Question	79

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Small businesses and community-based organizations (CBOs) are increasingly focused on the growing need for community well-being in low-performing and economically challenged areas within South Fulton, Georgia. Well-being is a fundamental human right and a universal human aspiration; however, some nationwide studies suggest that well-being (i.e., personal life satisfaction) varies across countries, and little is known about the desirability of other types of well-being (Krys et al., 2019). While daily living and well-being have always been challenging in underserved communities, the unexpected public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated problems in these areas and put a strain on vital services (Xafis, 2020). Community-based partnerships suffered. Seddighi et al. (2021) shared that a community's infrastructure is the most impacted by disaster. Services like water, health, transportation, energy, and telecommunication are critical areas that require ongoing support (Seddighi et al., 2021).

Small businesses struggled to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Kalogiannidis (2020) shared that small businesses were most impacted by lack of funding, leaving them with an inability to prepare for or sufficiently recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the globe, more than 188 countries were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kalogiannidis, 2020).

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to contribute to the knowledge needed to address the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia, to

help meet the needs of the community. The results of this study will include valuable insight into identifying ways to assist community NPOs and small business (SB) owners in building sustainable long-term partnerships.

Background

Many business owners seek to be good corporate citizens through involvement with the local communities in which they operate. While SB owners may not have the financial resources of larger corporations, they possess a strong connection and passion within the community to see growth and development. Park and Campbell (2018) shared examples of this to be matching gift programs, in-kind donations, volunteerism, and sponsorships. SB owners may have greater flexibility to offer jobs and job training, participate in community outreach initiatives, and play a vital role in the economic development of the area. Wright and Reames (2020) stated that by working together in the pursuit of local sustainability, NPOs could enhance organizational efficiency, increase organizational effectiveness, and drive broader social change through partnerships with small businesses.

The role of businesses in addressing community issues changed significantly in 2020. The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic put the viability of every industry at risk, especially small businesses, and community NPOs, and their ability to build meaningful relationships. As a result, SB owners faced increasing pressure to play a more active role in addressing ongoing community needs. Kalogiannidis (2020) shared that small businesses were most impacted by a lack of funding, leaving them unable to prepare for or sufficiently recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Relationships between

government, civil society, and private business organizations are changing rapidly in an ever-emerging global world. Appelbaum et al. (2016) offered that businesses are caught in a vicious cycle when it comes to the demand for economic efficiency and social progress. Park and Campbell (2018) shared that for most SB owners who have close ties to their local community, symbolic resources (i.e., reputation, trust, and reciprocity) become critical intangible assets that support their long-term success.

Problem Statement

The research problem that I addressed in this study was the lack of sustainable partnerships between local NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia. Nonprofit and SB partnerships can result in pooled resources and successful community outcomes, yet there are insufficient resources for nurturing and improving community well-being. According to Nelson (2017), many partnerships have been established over the past two decades. However, the scope of these partnerships varies among participants, level of activity, and purpose. Nelson (2017) identified that more in-depth analysis surrounding the impact of these relationships is in the infancy stage, yet useful lessons and best practices are emerging. This problem affects businesses, families, and the community at large in South Fulton, Georgia, but no studies have been conducted to determine how these nonprofit-SB partnerships can be facilitated.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. The central phenomenon is the lack of collaboration between local small

businesses and NPOs. Houterman (2013) shared that while potential barriers to collaboration may be a lack of financial resources, community goals, and objectives, successful partnerships are possible when both parties have trust, commitment, and communication. I used a qualitative research approach to identify potential barriers to collaborative partnerships. The participants included 10 nonprofit community leaders and 10 SB owners who serve communities in South Fulton, Georgia.

Research Question

What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia?

Theoretical Framework

I used partnership theory and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a blended theoretical framework for this study. According to Walsh (2004), partnership theory is a partnering process that implies a commitment to working toward common objectives, a high level of mutual trust, a willingness to cooperate, shared responsibility, and accepting accountability, and, where necessary, to alter the prevailing institutional structures. McQuaid (2000) shared that partnership covers greatly differing concepts and practices and describes various types of relationships in a myriad of circumstances and locations (pp. 27–53). McQuaid also noted that partnership involves the development and delivery of strategy or a set of projects or operations, although each participant may not be equally involved in all stages. According to Lee and Babiak (2017), collaborations between NPOs and corporations aim to serve social and commercial goals. I used partnership theory to show the alignment of CSR in large organizations that resonate with how SB

owners operate in the community. Small businesses play an important role in community involvement, engagement, and stability.

CSR is defined as the continuing commitment of businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, as well as the local community and society at large (Moir, 2001). Much of the research discussed the challenges large corporations face in the community and their need to focus on *CSR*. Corporations and SB owners understand that community engagement is foundational to creating sustainable communities (Wright & Reames, 2020). Researchers associate corporate philanthropy as part of the firm's *CSR* with direct charitable giving (Brammer & Millington, 2004). This approach characterizes the *CSR* orientation of firms that use corporate resources for charitable actions outside the firm's core business and without seeking direct business benefits. Walsh (2004) also contended that it is important that success is shared among the partnership members so that all can feel they are participating in programs designed to achieve win-win outcomes. Walsh shared that under the partnership framework, there is general agreement that locally focused, area-based integrated strategies can make a significant positive contribution to the economic and social well-being of many individuals and their communities.

The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of this study included understanding how community NPOs and small businesses build sustainable partnerships. For this research on nonprofit and SB partnerships, I conducted interviews with nonprofit leaders and SB owners to understand the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships that help

meet the needs of the community within South Fulton, Georgia. By conducting this study, I can offer solutions for NPOs and small businesses to help increase these community partnerships. By exploring the lived experiences of partnerships among SB owners and nonprofit leaders within South Fulton, Georgia, the study findings may include best practices and recommendations for future successful collaborations.

Nature of the Study

I used a generic qualitative approach to answer the research question. Basic, generic, or descriptive approaches are common forms of research and characteristically draw from concepts, models, and theories in social sciences, which provide the frameworks for qualitative studies (Caelli et al., 2003). Researchers who rely on a basic qualitative research approach must address the theoretical positioning of the researcher, the strategies to establish rigor, and the analytical lens through which the data are examined to reach credibility (Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers who use a basic descriptive qualitative approach stay closer to their data, despite the eclectic nature of the design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and re-representation techniques (Sandelowski, 2000). The generic qualitative methodology is used for greater freedom for the research and the ability to explore the participants' experiences around the study topic fully.

By doing in-person or virtual interviews, I was able to understand the barriers both NPOs and SB owners face when attempting to build long-term partnerships within South Fulton, Georgia. Baker and Edwards (2017) stated that interviews allow for rich, in-depth data on a particular phenomenon. I examined the experiences of both groups of

participants, showing their perspectives while supporting more in-depth communication and contact. South Fulton, Georgia, is one of the fastest-growing suburbs of the metropolitan Atlanta area. Chartered in May 2017, there is an estimated population of 107,436 (Berry-James et al., 2020). There are approximately 1,700 small to medium size businesses. The literature does not identify the number of community nonprofits registered in the area.

I recruited 18 participants through a purposive sampling technique, which was recommended by Dworkin (2012) as an adequate sample size for gathering in-depth data about the study phenomenon. This included two groups: (a) 10 area nonprofit leaders whose organizations implement programming initiatives that impact the community and require ongoing funding and partnering opportunities and (b) eight SB owners in the city who play a pivotal role in the community's growth and development but struggle with identifying ways to partner with area NPOs. I identified these participants through my research of local NPOs and registered small businesses with the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

In this data collection process, I used open-ended questions, careful probing, and follow-up questions to help identify themes in the responses that garnered meaning and understanding of the barriers. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were held in locations selected by the participants or held virtually. Throughout the study, data integrity was protected by storing information on a personal computer using a unique password. All hard copies are

stored in a secure cabinet at my home and will remain stored for a period of 5 years, upon which they will be destroyed.

Definitions

Community: A “group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share a certain practice that both defines the community and nurtures it” (Bellah et al., 2007, pp. 189–193). To understand the significance of community to the philanthropic sector, three qualities of it are especially important. First, a community is self-identifying, which means that individuals belong to it if they elect to consider themselves members of that community. Second, communities are sustained by voluntary action. Third, communities are where individuals express their most important values (Ott & Dicke, 2021).

Corporate social responsibility: A management concept where companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. CSR is generally understood as the company achieving a balance of economic, environmental, and social imperatives while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders (UNIDO, n.d.).

Nonprofit: The term “nonprofit” means different things to many different individuals. It is a commonly used word without a common understanding between the writer and reader. For this study, Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code refers to “public charities” (also known as charitable nonprofits), and “private foundations” is the definition that best identifies the participant organizations (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d.).

Partnership: Purposeful, lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with external stakeholders to work together to understand and address the core problems facing local communities (Roosa & Mischen, 2022).

SB: Determines the size of businesses in manufacturing, wholesale trade, mining, and certain other industries by employment size. For the purposes of this study, enterprises with 500 or fewer employees are small businesses. For some businesses in all other fields, the definitions are based on revenue; this makes it easy for the SB to establish its own eligibility but much more difficult for analysts of small businesses to classify a population of companies as “small” or “large” (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d.).

Well-being – A fundamental human goal and a universal human aspiration (Krys et al., 2019).

Assumptions

In every study, researchers must present their assumptions to provide others an opportunity to use the information for replication and transferability in other studies. All the participants provided honest and candid responses to the interview questions. A researcher’s trustworthiness of the participants is imperative to ensure the credibility of the qualitative findings. To achieve credibility, it is always assumed that participants will offer honest feedback. I had limited control over any information provided by participants who volunteered in this qualitative research study. The credibility of a study’s outcome could potentially be violated if any self-reported data appears deceptive. All participants were informed that honesty is a key factor in ensuring the information is

credible. The blended theoretical frameworks of partnership theory and CSR offered a theoretical purview to help understand the importance of this phenomenon. I assumed that McQuaid's theory on shared partnerships would offer the theoretical purview necessary to understand how partnerships between small businesses and NPOs can be influential and beneficial in minority communities. Theories play a vital role in discussing research findings, making these assumptions important. My final assumption was that the descriptive qualitative research method used in this study would offer insight into the perceived barriers that hindered local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. I used a descriptive qualitative research method for this study. I assumed that by using this method, the participants would provide honest and candid feedback on their lived experiences regarding partnerships between NPOs and small businesses.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of a study defines the boundaries of the research, including what will and what will not be encompassed in the study (Akanle et al., 2020). This study was limited to SB owners and nonprofit leaders who were asked about their experiences with building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia, to meet the needs of the community. I recruited only SB owners and nonprofit leaders for participation because the phenomenon of interest was the lack of collaboration between local small businesses and NPOs. Participants were not recruited from businesses, which do not meet the definition of a SB (as provided in the definitions section), or from the definition of NPOs.

Due to the research focus on understanding perceived barriers to sustainable collaboration and partnership between the two entities, I selected partnership theory and CSR to frame the study and assist in interpreting the collected data. The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize, but the results of this research in South Fulton, Georgia, may be transferable to other cities with similar attributes, such as demographics, which seek to build or strengthen partnerships between local small businesses and NPOs.

Limitations

Limitations in a research study are factors the researcher cannot control (Nenty, 2009). The limitations of this study may include nonprofit leaders who may not want to participate for fear that it will interrupt other partnerships with larger organizations. Other limitations could have included SB owners who may not participate out of concern that they will be expected to support area NPOs beyond a timeframe they feel comfortable with. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Using pseudonyms protects the participants' identity when using direct quotes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010), which were used in this study to illustrate emerging themes. Other limitations may have included my ability to bracket my personal knowledge and all other theoretical knowledge (see Patton, 2015) to give full attention to the phenomenon. This limitation could have influenced biases that alter the study outcome, especially with my nonprofit background. I used a reflective journal to address personal bias throughout my research process, and this was used to view the data through the lens of the participants.

Significance

Small businesses and NPOs are vital resources within the community. Addressing ongoing needs and social disparities brings awareness and resources to underserved communities. This study will play a significant part in assisting small businesses and community NPOs in the City of South Fulton, Georgia, to build relationships that create social change through shared collaborations. Collaborations could include examples like identifying long-term outreach programming to assist with improving vital educational resources to communities that are still recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is significant because I identified perceived barriers between NPOs and small businesses. I provided insights into how stronger partnerships can be forged through changes in policies or programs, whether they be formal or informal. I also showed the ways that small businesses can have a long-term influence on community resources and improve sustainability in the future. Small businesses and community NPOs may use the information from this study to broker private policy decisions that will lead to sponsored partnering opportunities to raise funds and address specific community causes.

Summary

Small businesses and NPOs are vital in communities that struggle with economic stability. There was little research available on the impact of SB and nonprofit partnership collaborations in local communities. Much of the research available spoke to the ongoing relationships between NPOs and larger corporations. Those collaborations have been used by NPOs to serve more needy individuals and qualify for more funding.

By providing information on their tracking and measurement outcomes, nonprofit leaders can show potential funders the total impact and influence of their programming and other resources provided to the community. Through these partnerships, small businesses can raise their competitive advantage by garnering free publicity for the good deeds done in their communities.

In this chapter, I discussed the background of the problem, particularly regarding the importance of small businesses and NPOs establishing partnerships. In this chapter, I highlighted the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, nature of the study, and definitions of terms. The discussion included the assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a presentation of the literature, literature search strategy, and the research database. I will explore CSR, nonprofit partnerships, community well-being, SB collaborations, and corporate collaborations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Leaders of small businesses and CBOs increasingly focus on the growing need for community well-being in low-performing and economically challenged areas within South Fulton, Georgia. The specific problem is the lack of partnerships between local NPOs and small businesses. The well-being of humanity is a universal goal. According to Krys et al. (2019), well-being is a concept often studied across various countries. Many of these areas are impoverished African American and Latino communities where families are at risk because of several situational circumstances beyond their control. According to Lee and Babiak (2017), collaborations between NPOs and corporations serve social and commercial goals. Medley and Akan (2008) reported that while the importance of community-oriented NPOs as agents of social action, provider services, and contributors to social health is evident in nearly every dimension of society, the reality is that for many of these organizations, everyday survival remains a constant challenge.

NPO leaders can enhance their organization's image and access resources and networks through collaborations. These collaborations can help NPOs serve more individuals in need, increase their quantitative data, and qualify for more funding. Lee (2011) shared that little research is available regarding partnership building between community SB owners and local NPOs. Much of the research discussed the challenges large corporations face in the community and their need to focus on CSR. Corporations and SB owners understand that community engagement is foundational to creating

sustainable communities (Wright & Reames, 2020). SB owners can improve their reputation by being more visible and showing their compassion for the community. They can raise their competitive advantage by garnering free publicity for the good deeds done in their communities. There is a significant need for ongoing funding initiatives to help support community-based programming provided by grassroots NPOs.

While leaders of large corporations and small businesses have a responsibility to be good stewards within the communities where they do business, the need is so great that it often becomes a challenge to fund every organization's mission. Owners of small businesses located in minority communities often do not consider themselves large enough to partner with area NPOs. A valued partnership between small businesses and NPOs helps the overarching ability of communities in need through sustainable resources in low-income areas. Measured societal value helps link needs, resources, solutions, services, and individuals in NPOs and shapes practical demand and supply in these markets (Lee & Babiak, 2017). Communities of practice theory speaks to groups of individuals who share the same morals and values to create awareness of needs and execute solutions to help benefit areas in need. In the NPO world, foundations are recognizing that philanthropy needs to focus on learning systems to fully leverage funded projects (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature and understand the relationships between community NPOs and small businesses and their overall impact on community well-being. A comprehensive review of the literature reveals the benefits and downfalls of such partnerships and how it benefits family well-being in social and

emotional environments. SB owners are poised to lead the nation in the development of communities and families (Watson et al., 2018). Their leadership is needed to ensure that every community has the foundation of evidence-based family support (Watson et al., 2018). The overall goal of this study was to understand the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships that help meet the needs of the community within South Fulton, Georgia. This chapter provides broad-based definitions of community NPOs and small businesses. The literature is presented to highlight the importance of local SB and community nonprofit partnerships and the influence of this relationship.

Literature Search Strategy

In this section, I review the literature and outline the framework of the study, identify the gaps in research, and offer insight into the barriers that hinder partnerships between community NPOs and small businesses. I researched a selection of peer-reviewed articles and journals using keywords to identify areas of relevance. Keywords such as *corporate social responsibility*, *social alliances*, *community engagement*, *nonprofit partnerships*, and *small business relationships* all were used to develop the argument. The keyword search results came from various sources, including the Walden Library database, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, Journal of Small Business Management, Nonprofit Quarterly, Journal of Communications Management, the Social Responsibility Journal, Corporate Governance International Review, and Forbes Magazine. Many phrases were independent and in various combinations to locate relevant articles. Searched phrases included but were not limited to *small business*,

nonprofit, corporate social responsibility, business collaboration, community partnerships, corporate partnerships, and nonprofit relationships.

Theoretical Foundation

The framework for this study was McQuaid's (2000) theory of partnership. McQuaid (2000) noted that partnership covers differing concepts and practices greatly and describes various types of relationships in a myriad of circumstances and locations. McQuaid (2000) also explained that partnership involves both the development and delivery of strategy or a set of projects or operations. However, each participant may not be equally involved in all stages. A changing global economy, government funding, and changing economic structures are altering the nature of partnerships, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom (Harding, 1990; McQuaid, 1994, 1998; Weaver & Dennert, 1987). A partnership is defined as any action which relies on the agreement of actors in the public and private sectors, and which also contributes in some way to improving the urban economy and the quality of life (Harding, 1990; McQuaid, 2000). The purpose of entering a partnership may be to gain extra resources for an area, project, or organization to collaborate and provide more resources (McQuaid, 2000). Lee and Babiak (2017) presented an argument centered around how measured societal value for NPOs is based upon a partnership with a corporation. There is an emphasis on the importance of relationships to help organizations and NPOs to find common interests in the community to help make a difference and provide much-needed resources. Leaders of corporations must address the critical role of corporate stakeholders in the organization's community involvement. Partnerships may also improve effectiveness, especially long-

term, by creating stability, building local confidence, and minimizing risks for partners and potential investors. They may be important mechanisms for building local capacity for action and control by the local community and other actors (McQuaid, 2000).

There is an insight into community-focused collaborations within corporations that encourage discussions on corporate fiscal responsibility and strategic alignment (Redmond & McKeever, 2018). Many corporations are overwhelmed with requests from many NPO initiatives in communities of all needs and backgrounds. While they would like to help fund them all, it is not financially feasible. Remund and McKeever (2018) focused on the unique strategy among partnering organizations on how to leverage further the resources and funding that large corporations bring to the table. Significant involvement requires serious discussion surrounding community relations and communications, promoting the initiatives, programs, and results of achievement that most grassroots NPOs do not have the marketing budget to pursue. Corporations often build relationships with NPO partners when designing and managing CSR programs to understand better social issues and leverage existing expertise and infrastructure (Remund & McKeever, 2018). Reid and Turbide (2012) focused extensively on identifying relationships among variables at institutional, organizational, and individual levels.

According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), there are frameworks that include predictors of CSR that are both reactive and proactive for community involvement. MacDonald et al. (2019) broke down a company's return on investment in various areas because of the partnerships and simultaneous benefits to the community. They concluded

that private, public, and civil society organizations increasingly experience complex sustainable development challenges, such as resource scarcity or other risks associated with climate change and unsustainable consumption (MacDonald et al., 2019). One collaborative approach to deal with these issues is through multi-stakeholder partnerships, which bring together the knowledge and resources of many stakeholders to address a shared agenda. When the community and the partners see the partnership as having an impact on community sustainability, it gives the partnership legitimacy, resulting in additional reputational gains for the partners.

Sanzo et al. (2013) provided the basis for a study that focuses on business-NPO partnerships and evaluates their influence on the NPO's development of innovations, capability building, and performance. The importance of NPOs for firms' corporate responsibility and innovation initiatives results from two main factors. The first factor is their growing contribution to the well-being of societies in terms of health care, education, culture, social services, and environmental or human rights protection (Chaves & Monzón, 2012; Roeger et al., 2016). The second factor refers to the relevance of social innovation in current societies as an "essential factor for fostering sustainable growth, securing jobs and increasing competitive abilities, especially during the economic and financial markets crisis" (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010, pp. 6–7). Austin (2000) provided insight on the relative importance of wholistic collaboration between NPOs and businesses from the leadership throughout the organization's employees and staff. There is value in personal relationships that can determine the success and longevity of a partnership that evolves to improve and impact social change because of the relationship.

It must also transcend over time, even if leadership changes. Sönmez (2017) shared that social problems have grown in magnitude and complexity, and NPOs have proliferated to address these. Lorenzen (2012) explained that the search for new resources and more effective organizational approaches brings NPOs and corporations together.

Austin (2000) shared that social purpose partnerships appear to be motivationally fueled by the emotional connection that individuals make both with the social mission and with their counterparts in the other organization. Trust appears to be one of the critical elements common to most forms of collaboration (Burke & Stets, 1999; Dickson & Weaver, 1997; Kanter, 1994; Larson, 1992; Rackham & Moody, 1996; Ring & Van de Ven 1994; Waddock, 1988; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994). Although good relationships will not guarantee alliance success, bad interpersonal relations can destroy a partnership. Lee (2011) explored the dynamics of how a partnership works within seven established business-community partnerships. Elkington and Fennell (2000) shared that businesses continue to identify ways to forge community partnerships. Cha et al. (2018) reviewed the correlation between a leader's personal and societal engagement and how it impacts their community involvement.

Sanzo et al. (2015) pointed out that ultimately the results show that close relationships based on trust and commitment foster the NPO's development of innovations, although the intensity of this effect depends on the type of firm's contribution to the partnership. Some researchers associate corporate philanthropy, as part of the firm's CSR, with direct charitable giving (Brammer & Millington, 2004). This approach characterizes the CSR orientation of firms that use corporate resources for

charitable actions outside the firm's core business and without seeking direct business benefits. Core competencies exchange poses more excellent value on partnerships that allow for more involvement in community needs where leaders from both organizations can build sufficient resources. Most firms contribute to NPOs in several significant ways, including monetary contributions, in-kind gifts, infrastructure/equipment, and corporate employee volunteer programs. Appelbaum et al. (2016) addressed the growing discussion within organizations to align sustainability and organizational change with the overarching goal of building relative change.

Corporate sustainability is a transformational change that impacts business culture and its relationship with its community. Implementing any form of corporate sustainability requires that managers understand their objectives and the cultural and psychological barriers of organizational change. Better engagement with those undertaking organizational change and clear articulation of the change's purpose can better lend themselves to an initiative's success. Porter and Kramer (2011) argued that there needs to be a shift in how businesses interact with society and the environment, focusing on development. The authors considered that businesses are caught in a vicious cycle, which includes: (a) the demand for economic efficiency and (b) social progress. The solution lies in the principle of shared value, which involves creating economic value that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Learning how to create shared value is the means for a business to focus on social problems (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Ryan et al. (2012) affirmed that current

world changes in sustainability will require “both incremental and transformational” alterations in organizations (pp. 5–8).

Ryan et al. (2012) considered that for an organization to achieve sustainability, it should not act in isolation. Change can never be wholly successful if treated in some top-down manner or merely through incentives or sanctions (Ryan et al., 2012). Watson et al. (2018) suggested that to build tomorrow’s workforce, business leaders must lead the country in securing the necessary investment in the healthy development of children and families. Their leadership is needed to ensure that every community has the foundation of evidence-based family support to produce tomorrow’s workforce. The next generation of businesses and scholars can work together to design tools that support effective investments in healthy development locally or nationally. Many employees expect to work for a company that gives back. They want to give back on their own terms and decide what causes to support and when to volunteer. It is important for company leaders to survey their employees and form relationships with NPOs to discover what their employees are passionate about.

Coombs and Holladay (2011) shared that CSR is the voluntary response to the varied and sometimes contradictory demands of internal and external stakeholders. Since the turn of the century, corporate–nonprofit partnerships have emerged as one of the most common and fastest-growing forms of CSR (Costanza et al., 2007; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). The partnerships bring together two functionally different organizations (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010) to advance each partner’s strategic goals and interests (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Shumate & O’Connor, 2010). Typical corporate–NPO partnerships

include co-branding, sponsorship, and certification initiatives. Through communication, both corporations and NPOs make the contours of the partnership known to engage in public dialogue, make legitimate claims, and establish relationships with stakeholders (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010). For NPOs, partnerships can alleviate funding pressures, increase social and political support for services, enhance perceptions of competence, and influence business priorities (Rademacher & Remus, 2017). Several researchers also indicated that partnerships could amplify the reputation and legitimacy of corporations, create competitive advantage and brand differentiation opportunities, reduce skepticism, and increase credibility (Heller & Reitsema, 2010; Lafferty, 2009; Schmeltz, 2017). Bocquet et al. (2020) contended that the demands for CSR encourage business owners to create partnerships with NPOs (Selsky & Parker, 2005), which represent stakeholders that act on behalf of the common good (Arenas et al., 2009). Kolk et al. (2010) referred to business–NPO partnerships as “social alliances,” characterized by a voluntary collaboration to address social or environmental issues with non-economic objectives (pp. 123–137).

Literature Review

NPO Structure

Austin (2000) focused on the importance of holistic collaboration between NPOs and businesses from the leadership throughout the organization's employees and staff. There is value in personal relationships that can determine the success and longevity of a partnership that evolves to improve and impact social change because of the relationship. It must also transcend over time, even if leadership changes. Social problems have grown

in magnitude and complexity, and NPOs have proliferated to address these (Austin, 2000). The search for new resources and more effective organizational approaches brings NPOs and corporations together. Alliances such as these are emerging because business leaders are reevaluating their traditional philanthropic practices and looking for ways to engage with their communities that will have greater corporate relevance and social impact (Lorenzen, 2012). Individuals create and nurture institutional partnerships. Social purpose partnerships appear to be motivationally fueled by individuals' emotional connection with the social mission and their counterparts in the other organization. Trust appears to be one of the critical elements common to most forms of collaboration (Burke & Stets, 1999; Dickson & Weaver, 1997; Kanter, 1994; Larson, 1991; Rackham & Moody, 1996; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Waddock, 1988; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994). Although good relationships will not guarantee alliance success, bad interpersonal relations can destroy a partnership.

Wright and Reames (2020) discussed the need and impact that community-based NPOs and nongovernmental organizations play in providing resources within the community. These organizations are critical to viable, sustainable development and community investment initiatives in communities of color or low-income levels. Collaborations are significant to ensure that nonprofit leaders can lead effectively and thoroughly understand the community's needs and how best to help. Community-based nongovernmental organizations are seen as leaders in local economic development, with a growing capacity for undertaking community sustainability projects in distressed neighborhoods. Despite sporadic and often inadequate financial support, CBOs have

assumed responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development, including residential weatherization, energy conservation, transportation, and housing and shelter for urban and rural communities. NPOs that integrate broad-based participation strategies and coalition building in their urban development efforts tend to be more effective.

Bell and McCambridge (2020) explained how the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light many of the accelerated issues NPO leaders faced. While NPOs have been around for decades, their level of relevancy tends to fade in and out in many communities. Many have questioned organizational relationships with the community, donors, and trustworthiness surrounding funding. Bell and McCambridge considered these “pre-existing” conditions a severe and immediate risk to many organizational leaders’ ability to carry out their programming, revenue models, and commitments to the community. Bell and McCambridge suggests that this inherent intellectual knowledge may often be what helps build lasting relationships.

Ridley-Duff (2007) argued that sustainable social organization evolves out of equitable relationships, with accidental innovation and experimentation playing a significant role. Studies of enduring companies that are “built to last” or, which make the transition from “good to great” (Collins, 2001) support the view that social capital is vital to sustainable businesses regardless of the economic sector in which they develop or the philosophy that drives their development. Sustainable companies (and economies) are built slowly by individuals who collaborate over many years and not through the deliberate agency of visionary leaders or charismatic entrepreneurs. The emergence of a social enterprise sector results from a long historical process and movement that

embraces human endeavor as social and rational. Humans are capable of developing enterprises that are socio-economic in their commitments and can be governed by Habermasian principles that guarantee participation in opinion-forming and decision-making (Habermas et al., 1974; Laville & Nyssens, 2001; Thompson & Holt, 1996; Tonnies, 1952).

Laasonen et al. (2012) focused on the relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and companies who join to form a business and society discourse on NGO-business relations. Laasonen et al. aimed to (a) show where there were dominating factors around NGO-business relations in the areas of business and society discourse, (b) expose how these relationships suppress these areas, and (c) assess the positive and negative effects of these dynamic relationships.

Zerillo (2021) discussed the ongoing need for community partners to actively listen to one another and take time to understand the overarching need and focus on providing ongoing resources. Building a community effectively requires a focus on collaboration. NPO leaders seeking to pursue increased community engagement and institutional efficacy must find a balance between working in brick-in-mortar places and online spaces.

Sanzo et al. (2015) shared that the importance of NPOs for firms' CSR innovation initiatives results from two main factors. The first factor is their growing contribution to the well-being of societies in terms of health care, education, culture, social services, and environmental or human rights protection (Chaves & Monzón 2012; Roeger et al., 2016). The second factor refers to the relevance of social innovation in current societies as an

“essential factor for fostering sustainable growth, securing jobs and increasing competitive abilities, especially during the economic and financial markets crisis” (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010, pp. 6–7).

Vu (2019) shared that NPOs suffer more when leadership includes individuals with more corporate or academic backgrounds and no authentic nonprofit leadership and skillset. NPO professionals understand the need to operate a successful NPO and the challenges faced financially and systemically and can navigate the process without a hands-on approach. A lot of time and energy is spent catching influential individuals up on the basics. It is exhausting educating the individuals who have power and influence in the sector about topics like equity, diversity, and inclusion, or even fundamental nonprofit truths like general operating funds are the most effective form of funding. There is a need to prioritize hiring individuals with lived experiences in our issues.

The ongoing challenges that community NPOs face in building trust within the community are not only among partner organizations but clients and large funders. NPOs flow in and out of relevance for the public, sometimes because they cannot remain current, or they complete their missions. Sometimes it is because they violate their relationships with donors and the public. These problems, caused by a breaking trust, are in a different category of a pre-existing condition than what is being experienced by those who, by nature of their programming, revenue models, and community commitments, are at severe and immediate risk—along with their communities (Bell & McCambridge, 2020).

Costanza et al. (2007) outlined and defined *quality of life (QoL)* as an explicit or implicit goal within communities. Their diverse approach presents multiple disciplines that review definitions of QoL that measure both human needs and well-being or happiness. QoL can be determined in forms of human, social, and natural capital to include time spent in areas where resources are scarce.

Harris (2012) explained that while there has been growing scholarly interest recently in hybrid organizational arrangements between NPOs and small businesses, very little has been researched on this level of activity. Relationships between NPOs and government entities are vast; however, they are often limited based on time. Harris suggested that further studies on the relationships between small businesses and NPOs are conducted to close the gap on the lack of these partnerships.

Houterman (2013) explored what drives the motives for seeking for-profit and NPO collaborations. Many of these collaborations are mired by barriers such as concern over the financial ability of for-profit entities to maintain a long-term partnership and a NPO's overarching need for specific goods and services that may be of limitation to a small business. Houterman suggested that for these partnerships to be successful, they must first effectively communicate the needs and expectations, build trust, and commit to seeing the collaboration grow and meet the goals of not only the relationship but the community for long-term impact.

McKee and Froelich (2016) presented a look into the overwhelming lack of successful succession planning among NPOs. With the economic and social significance of the presence of NPOs in communities across the globe, many continue to be

challenged with one of the greatest barriers to successful planning for the future of the organization. McKee and Froelich found that there is a lack of leaders, executive directors, and chief executive officers (CEO)s to run many of the organizations due to a lack of sufficient funding to support administrative costs. McKee and Froelich addressed these shortcomings as well as the importance for NPOs to have a succession plan in place for how the organization will proceed forward through growth and development.

Medley and Akan (2008) studied a look into an assessment change model that helps leaders of NPOs take a closer look at challenges they face by way of decreased funding, loss of clients, and improvement in programming and outreach initiatives. Medley and Akan reviewed the Lewin model, which helped leaders of NPOs refine their missions, programs, and successful partnership opportunities. NPOs and business partnerships can be successful with a collaborative plan in place to help structure sufficient programming.

Reid and Turbide (2012) conducted a study to examine the ever-evolving relationships between NPO staff and their board of directors. While relationships or partnerships are created between NPOs and businesses, it is important that the organization has a board of directors to oversee all aspects of how things run. Reid and Turbide argued that many NPOs run into financial challenges because of increased programming and the need for additional staff. Reid and Turbide's study give insight into how the board works with the NPO leadership in areas of crisis and commitment to partnerships. The researchers spoke on the need for trust between the board of directors and the leadership of the nonprofit (Reid & Turbide, 2012).

Roeger et al. (2016) reviewed the role of the Nonprofit Almanac, which was developed by the National Center for Charitable Statistics and published by the Urban Institute Press. This publication gives information on all 501(c)(3) public charities outlining their growth in size and finances along with any private charitable contributions and volunteering capacity. While updated frequently, Roeger et al. reviewed the publication from 2008–2010 statistics. The authors found that in 2008 there were 1.5 million NPOs registered with the Internal Revenue Service. Roeger et al. found the largest category of public charities listed as 501(c)(3) were more than 950,000 organizations. It is noted that the Internal Revenue Service's regulations identify more than 30 types of tax-exempt organizations known best as nonprofit or not-for-profit.

Sönmez (2017) shared that the magnitude of social problems being addressed comes with layers of complexity. Social alliances are much needed to assist in areas where NPOs, government entities, and businesses find themselves needing to collaborate. Businesses, small and large, are finding that community-based partnerships play a key role in their success. Sönmez argued that the structural component of social alliances makes them different from any other partnerships. Sönmez indicated there must be an understanding of which factors will create value within the alliance and how it will be managed and effective.

Krys et al. (2019) focused on family well-being from an intra-personal perspective by studying how a single individual judges the well-being of their family, which can be complementary to an interpersonal perspective (i.e., judgments of family well-being averaged or agreed between members of a family). Like Diener et al. (1985),

Krys et al. (2019) defined *family life satisfaction* as an individual's global assessment of their family's QoL according to their criteria. Hitokoto and Uchida (2015) defined *family-interdependent happiness* as a global subjective assessment of whether an individual's family is socially harmonized with other individuals, quiescent, ordinary, and connected to the collective way of well-being. In instances when the differentiation between life satisfaction and interdependent happiness was unnecessary, I referred to both and the umbrella term well-being. As the body of studies on well-being grows, this question becomes fundamental. Although well-being seems to be desired by most individuals, studies on the valuation of personal life satisfaction suggest that this specific type of well-being is not equally high across countries (Diener, 2000; Hornsey et al., 2018). Individualistic countries value personal life satisfaction more than collectivistic countries (Koh, 2014).

The Nonprofit Finance Fund (2018) reported that more than 60% of NPOs use collaborations to increase services in the community, strengthen programming, and reduce administrative expenses. Wei-Skillern and Silver (2013) shared that NPO stakeholders, large corporate funders, SB owners, community leaders, and donors expect NPOs to build partnerships to establish resources and deliver results. External partnerships are beneficial when the collaboration focuses on the impact on the community and economic development. According to Donahue (2020), micro, small, and medium for-profit enterprises should consider partnering with local NPOs and other organizations whose mission is serving the public good and implementing community-based cause-related marketing campaigns to help sustain and grow economic activity.

Through cause-related marketing, small businesses can agree to donate a portion of sales to assist partner organizations in building upon community programming, outreach, and other well-being needs.

SB Structure

Kalogiannidis (2020) presented an idea of the COVID-19 pandemic's overall effect on small businesses. As a result of this crisis, the world witnessed the largest fall in the number of active small businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted the nation's supply chain and global trade. As a result, the research shows the impact on small businesses, employees, and how they do business and has changed the overall business policies facing economic imbalance.

Heller and Reitsema (2010) focused on brand alliances in the private sector. Describing that these alliances are now becoming a focal point among NPOs, brand alliances can benefit both NPOs and small businesses. Heller and Schwarz (2010) contended that while these alliances are beneficial, they must also be the right match between NPOs and small businesses. Both entities must be aware of the public reputation of the partnering organization to determine if strategic alignment would benefit them and the community.

Aguinis and Glavas (2012) offered a view of the theoretical framework from both a multidisciplinary and multilevel perspective. They previewed mechanisms of CSR that outline the outcome of these relationships and contingent effects on the community. The authors offered a future perspective on how to integrate diverse theoretical frameworks.

While there is not much literature that focuses solely on SB and NPO relationships, Cameron et al. (2007) provided a narrative to synthesize the SB and external research and to identify and categorize variables studied and links between these categories, so the results are helpful as a starting point for future SB research. Some aspects of the small business' external relationship, such as relationship strength, network size, network structure, relationship type, goal compatibility, and existing trust, represent the largest area of research regarding antecedents (Cameron et al., 2007).

Sanzo et al. (2015) argued that cross-sector partnerships are a powerful form of collaboration. Through cross-sector partnerships, key development of social innovation practices can be instituted to help an organization grow. With an innate focus on capability building and performance, the study evaluated the business-nonprofit relationship and the overarching influence on the NPO's development. As with other studies, Sanzo et al. (2015) also showed that a key part of successful cross-sector partnerships is based on trust and collaborative commitment to ensuring the NPO's success.

Sönmez (2017) shared that the magnitude of social problems being addressed today comes with layers of complexity. In times such as this, social alliances are much needed to assist in areas where NPOs, government entities, and businesses find themselves needing to collaborate. Businesses, small and large, are finding that community-based partnerships play a key role in their success. Sönmez argued that the structural component of social alliances makes them different from any other

partnerships. There must be an understanding of which factors will create value within the alliance and how it will be managed and effective.

Kotler et al. (2012) suggested that small businesses might work with community NPOs to assist with improvements to social well-being through ongoing philanthropic donations, workforce volunteering, and job training. In many national economies, NPOs contribute more than 3% of the gross national product and more than 40% of the economic value from the health and social service sectors (United Nations, 2018). In 2011, there were a recorded 400 million formal and informal medium for-profit enterprises operating worldwide, and over 350 million operating in developing economies (Donahue, 2020). Al-Tabbaa et al. (2014) and Harris (2012) shared that research on nonprofit partnerships has focused mostly on the corporation and only partially on variations of relationships between small businesses and NPOs. Seitanidi and Ryan (2007) noted that more consideration should be given to NPOs' positions in small partnerships and why these relationships may be asymmetrical.

SB and Nonprofit Relationship

Bryson et al. (2006) presented that cross-sector collaborations are key when considering community-based partnerships. The authors shared that to deal with community challenges in the most humane way effectively, we must begin to understand the multi-level sectors of our democratic society (Bryan et al., 2006). Collaboration must be at the forefront among businesses, NPOs, philanthropies, media, community, and government to be successful in tackling current social problems.

Hitokoto and Uchida (2015) tied the concept of “interdependent happiness,” and “well-being” together for an understanding of how collective relationships within a community of individuals can build upon better well-being and overall happiness. Building healthy relationships contributes to better resources and better community health, happiness, and well-being. Herman (2003) stated that “interdependent happiness” “is timely and necessary for the development of research in SB and nonprofit partnerships (pp. 146–160).

Donahue (2020) shared that research shows NPOs and businesses can form successful partnerships. These partnerships are designed for community improvement. Cause-related marketing is a common partnership where the business supports the efforts of NPOs through a portion of its sales to assist with the economic impact. This article gives perspective on partnerships established during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these relationships help enhance community self-reliance and reduce health inequities.

Burke et al. (1999) examined how the influence of the development of commitment in society is directly related to trust and self-processes. Positive emotions and trust, as it relates to self-verification, play a crucial role in developing committed relationships and partnerships (Burke et al., 1999). These levels of emotions among stakeholders are important to building and sustaining partner relations within the community.

Porter and Kramer (2011) argued that healthy communities and competitive companies go hand in hand. Businesses, small and large, need communities to be successful in ensuring demand for their products, providing crucial public assets, and

bringing strong support to the environment. Successful business and NPO partnerships can lead to jobs, economic education, and sustainable wealth creation.

Reilly (2016) introduced the social enterprise model and how for-profit and nonprofit entities can benefit from this type of partnership. The social enterprise model allows for-profit organizations whose products or services directly benefit the community to work with NPOs to build a relationship to assist with unmet needs in a community or society. The benefit of the SB model could be publicity and social awareness, and the nonprofit can have access to more resources for its participants. NPOs are important to a nation's economic well-being and have nearly doubled in the last 30 years (Reilly, 2016).

Maktoufi et al. (2020) identified the common forms of corporate–nonprofit partnerships, including co-branding, sponsorship, and certification initiatives. Through communication, corporations and NPOs make the contours of the partnership known to engage in public dialogue, make legitimate claims, and establish relationships with stakeholders (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010). For NPOs, partnerships can alleviate funding pressures, increase social and political support for services, enhance perceptions of competence, and influence business priorities (Rademacher & Remus, 2017). Partnerships can amplify the reputation and legitimacy of corporations, create competitive advantage and brand differentiation opportunities, reduce skepticism, and increase credibility (Heller & Reitsema, 2010; Lafferty, 2009; Schmeltz, 2017).

Sanzo et al. (2015) argued that cross-sector partnerships are a powerful form of collaboration. Through cross-sector partnerships, key development of social innovation practices can be instituted to help an organization grow. With an innate focus on

capability building and performance, the researcher evaluated the business-nonprofit relationship and the overarching influence on the NPO's development. As with other studies, Sanzo (2015) also showed that a key part of successful cross-sector partnerships is based on trust and collaborative commitment to ensuring the NPO's success.

Al-Tabbaa et al. (2014) explained that the relationship between NPOs and businesses is a valued partnership that benefits the community, businesses, and NPOs. The researchers discussed a framework that helps develop a strategy with these collaborations. They also posed the argument that a proactive approach to building these collaborative relationships can help enhance sustainability among both NPOs and small businesses.

Wright and Reames (2020) addressed the need and impact that community-based NPOs and nongovernmental organizations play in providing resources within the community. These organizations are essential to viable, sustainable development and community investment initiatives in communities of color or low-income levels. Collaborations are significant to ensure that NPO leaders have the skills to lead effectively and understand the community's needs fully and how best to help. Wright and Reames (2020) shared that community-based nongovernmental organizations have merit as leaders in local economic development, with a growing capacity for undertaking community sustainability projects in distressed neighborhoods. Despite sporadic and often inadequate financial support, CBOs have assumed responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development, including residential weatherization, energy conservation, transportation, and the provision of housing and shelter to urban and rural communities

(Wright & Reames, 2020). Wright and Reames (2020) also presented that NPOs that integrate broad-based participation strategies and coalition building in their urban development efforts tend to be more effective.

Arenas et al. (2009) presented discrepancies between the perception of the somewhat controversial roles of others and the self-perceptions of NGOs. Arenas et al. shared those secondary stakeholders, like NGOs, play a crucial role in CSR, although controversial and oftentimes contested. The researchers also presented in the review an outlook on the integration of environmental and social concerns surrounding business activity and corporate governance. Nonprofit leaders are the foundation for the development and collaboration of community partnerships. One of the barriers they face is the dilemma of addressing the pressures to collaborate to meet the ongoing demand for services and a leadership deficit simultaneously. The nonprofit sector faces barriers to recruiting, retaining, and training its leading managers in this area (Nonprofit HR Solutions, 2016; Pitman, 2016). Most leaders of NPOs cannot afford to formally train leadership staff around development and partnership, which forces them to rely more on experience (Benevene & Cortini, 2010; McKee & Froelich, 2016).

Lee (2011) found that although partnerships involving business and community organizations may be associated with shared societal issues, this study's findings showed a very strong focus on individual community organization goals and business priorities. Lee addressed practical challenges faced when developing SB and NPO partnerships. Lee (2011) argued that partner goal orientations and expectations are areas that must be understood on the front end.

Lee and Babiak (2017) explained that partnerships between NPOs and corporations are often devised to help serve social and commercial goals within the community. Sponsorships help increase NPO contributions while also showing stewardship of the corporations. It is evidenced through their research that NPOs and businesses alike can garner credibility with this measured societal value. If endorsed by sources that are trusted within the community, this could help increase donations of money, time, and resources.

Organizational Structure

McQuaid (1998) shared that while partnerships bring forth much-needed economic regeneration in minority communities, there is not enough understanding on theoretical basis to understand the gaps in these areas. McQuaid (1998) presented economic development-based examples surrounding urban initiatives in Scotland through the advantages and disadvantages of these relationships. McQuaid (1998) suggested that an understanding of the behaviors and policies of the NPOs in urban areas plays a pivotal role in businesses considering such partnerships and relationships.

McQuaid (2000) reviewed the issues concerning the theoretical and policy reasons for NPOs and businesses to form partnerships. McQuaid (2000) argued that such partnerships integrate economic development and ways in which urban and rural communities can obtain much-needed resources. Many resources come from federal and local government as well as private sector support from area businesses. It is shared that viable analysis of understanding the theoretical basis of these relationships remains poorly developed.

Moir (2001) explored expectations that can be conflicting when it comes to a company's social responsibility. Socially responsible behavior often conflicts with how a corporation's leaders manage its image based on its community outreach. They must find the balance of benefits to the business and ensure the goal of benefiting the partnership is reached. Moir offered a look at the various explanations or definitions of CSR in practice and based on literature.

Ring and Van de Ven (1994) reviewed transaction-specific investments, also known as cooperative inter-organizational relationships (IORs). These deals often are not fully specified or managed by both parties at the onset of their execution. There is a formal, legal, and informal social psychological process framework that is negotiated between both parties to commit to and execute the partnership to achieve favorable outcomes and solutions. The authors explored any implications for entering IORs based on transaction cost economics and any implications for managing the relationship. Ring and Van de Ven determined there must be a congruent understanding of the other's expectations between both parties as it relates to negotiations to commit to a cooperative IOR successfully.

Houterman (2013) explored what drives the motives for seeking for-profit and NPO collaborations. Many of these collaborations are mired by barriers such as concern over the financial ability of for-profit entities to maintain a long-term partnership and a NPO's overarching need for specific goods and services that may be of limitation to a small business. Houterman suggested that for these partnerships to be successful, they must first effectively communicate the needs and expectations, build trust, and commit to

seeing the collaboration grow and meet the goals of not only the relationship but the community for long-term impact.

Cha et al. (2018) explored the personal engagement of corporate CEOs in societal causes and how it affects the company's role in community initiatives. Upper echelon and stakeholder theory are two theoretical frameworks developed that the characteristics of an organization's executive leadership play a critical role in a company's environmental and social engagement. Cha et al. reported that civic-minded CEOs are more likely to ensure that the organization has a significant role in community engagement activities. This level of leadership often leads to greater philanthropic involvement, community volunteerism, and partnership development.

Habermas et al. (1974) discussed the "public sphere" and how the social aspect of individuals' lives oftentimes leads to greater public opinion of any given topic. Basic conversations among any group of people can create the ability to express opinions on matters of general interest. Corporations and small businesses could garner conversations from leadership surrounding ways to partner in community initiatives that help build relationships.

Using a multilevel and multidisciplinary framework, Reid and Turbide's (2012) framework includes reactive and proactive predictors of CSR. The focus was significantly on identifying relationships among institutional, organizational, and individual variables. Reid and Turbide spoke inherently to the importance of relationships to help organizations and NPOs to find common interests in the community to help make a difference and provide much-needed resources. It addresses the vital role those

corporate stakeholders have in community involvement. Three main factors play a role including (a) instrumental (self-interest), (b) relational (based on a concern with relationships among group members), and (c) moral (based on ethical standards and moral principles). Medley and Akan (2008) reviewed the Lewin model, which focuses on structuring organizational development and decision-making. The model helps nonprofit leaders look at their strategic planning process from an inside-out stance and identify areas where they have always done it; this way, mentality shifts to how to improve in areas that do not contribute to the overarching program success goal.

Kanter (1994) shared that top executives often devote time to screening potential partners more based on financial gain than the partnership in human terms. Kanter argued that this type of viewpoint only lasts for as long as it takes the organization to reach the benchmark goal of the relationship. However, whatever the overarching goal of the executive, collaborative relationships are a necessary part of doing business. Kanter called it a “collaborative advantage” (pp. 96–108). Building long-term relationships allows for fruitful and sustainable collaborations to be established.

Kolk et al. (2010) addressed the macro and meso perspectives of cross-sector social partnerships. Kolk et al. argued that focusing on the effects of cross-sector social partnerships helps in understanding the gaps in the research and offers more insight into the process of interaction among groups seeking to collaborate. The in-depth look included how the “trickle down” effect from top-tier management to employees on the importance of these relationships and their overall success. The thought is that partnerships can have more leverage with wider benefits to both entities if an

organization has significant buy-in from the top and middle management, employees, and customers.

Kotler et al. (2012) argued that a “shared value” mindset among businesses creates opportunities for economic value for the organizations and society by addressing the needs and challenges (p. 3). Kotler et al. believed that social issues should be the core by which they seek to establish relationships within the community. According to Kotler et al., it is believed that initiatives should be divided into two groups of consideration, which include: (a) marketing-oriented (cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing) and (b) corporate values and objectives (workforce volunteering, socially responsible business practices).

Seddighi et al. (2021) shared that the public–private–people partnership is a significant element in any disaster response. The COVID-19 pandemic was the worst disaster experienced in decades. To respond effectively, the government needed extra capacity and assistance from the private sector and the community. Seddighi et al. presented evidence of how crucial these partner collaborations are and identify who participated in the response procedure through some associations or groups, such as religious and ethnic communities, as well as through non-governmental organizations and small businesses.

McNeish et al. (2019) gave an unprecedented look into solicited relationships through the formation of community advisory boards and coalitions. McNeish et al.’s research specifically focused on the mental health of men and boys. The study added to the limited research on best practices for forming community partnerships and should

guide community-based evaluators and program planners (McNeish et al., 2019). The study findings further solidified the lack of data surrounding best practices to establish and maintain sustainable and thriving community partnerships and programming initiatives. Relationships are a crucial factor in every successful partnership. McNeish et al. (2019) provided insight into how trust can play a significant role in a historically successful program that may provide a better life for men and boys of a particular race in low-income areas. Their circumstances immediately impact this demographic and play a role in the sustainability of their continued lived experiences.

Cho and De Moya (2016) focused their research on actual community engagement, which gave insight into how leaders of corporations who focus on CSR look for organizations that will provide them with in-depth tracking and measurement outcomes of success or failure because of the partnerships. Cho and De Moya concluded that true community empowerment could lead to empowerment within the community, meaning that once everyone realizes they all play an intricate role in survival and success, then everyone will win. Cho and De Moya also delved into understanding why such relationships become the responsibility of staff from the department of public affairs in most corporations to oversee. Understanding that while corporations have a responsibility to the community, they also want everyone to know just how vested they are in seeing progress and improvement. Empowerment is critical for understanding corporate community engagement (Cho & De Moya, 2016).

Baur et al. (2012) shared that current corporate interest in establishing community partnerships is driven mostly by the need to establish credentials as good community

stewards for most corporations. Where the level of accountability between both NPOs and corporations is synonymous with maintaining a good relationship that benefits the community at large (Baur et al., 2012). The researchers argued that good CSR should actively engage and encourage NGO partnerships to strengthen, build and develop more of these relationships.

Diener (2000) explored subjective well-being and how individuals evaluate their lives. The researcher focused on how individuals' goals relate to their feelings of well-being in their communities and cultural influences. Diener used naturalistic experience sampling and methodological refinement to study subjective well-being and how it is used to produce happiness.

Brammer and Millington (2004) investigated the outcomes of corporate charitable donations study of corporate behavior from periods 1989–1990 and 1998–1999. The study included more than 400 companies in the United Kingdom. Great emphasis was placed on industry effects and impact on environmental and social stakeholders.

Brammer and Millington noted that early on, corporate donations were mostly determined by profits. Over time, relationships weakened, and partnerships were largely determined by stakeholder influence. As a result, there was a realization of the importance of corporate visibility in community change outcomes.

Hargreaves et al. (2020) observed that more communities, service practitioners, and policymakers are recognizing the value of building collective community capacity to improve the health and well-being of their populations. There is no one best set of core governance capacities, collaborative network characteristics and structures, community

problem-solving processes, or community change strategies. What matters more is the alignment of these multiple capacities with a particular constellation of community-level goals. These goals include starting with the end in mind, which includes developing a common vision of an intended set of community goals and conditions and then working backward to: (a) identify effective system and community change strategies for those goals and conditions, (b) assemble a collaborative network of community partners to help develop, implement, and improve those strategies, and (c) provide the core governance and infrastructure capacities-leadership, communications, funding, and infrastructure to sustain these networking activities (Hargreaves et al., 2017). Businesses could lead the nation in securing the necessary investment in the healthy development of children and their families (Watson et al., 2018). Their leadership is needed to ensure that every community has the foundation of evidence-based family support to produce the future's workforce.

In addition, findings from a survey by Nonprofit HR Solutions reported that NPOs do not strategically plan for leadership development, and more than 78% indicated they would not be able to name a successor if their executive leadership team members left without notice (Larcker et al., 2015). Berry (2020) examined the Census 2020 pertaining to civil rights and social equity. The U.S. Constitution mandates the Census totals and pertains to the civil rights of everyone. The census has a direct impact on underserved communities where a dire need exists for federal, local, and private funding. Public administrators are crucial in the U.S. Census' success in assisting in areas of social equity, leadership, and community development and improvement.

Laville and Nyssens (2001) presented the term social economy as a way of describing collaborations between businesses and NPOs in Europe. NPOs collaborate with organizations with limits on the material interests of capital investors who only seek common patrimony as a priority to return on investment. Laville and Nyssens explained that social enterprise is sought by groups of citizens who will offer an expanded range of services and openness to the community being served.

Lorenzen (2012) presented the need for value creation when corporate-NGO partnerships are established. Lorenzen shared that value creation is a crucial aspect of partnerships if they plan to be successful. It is understood that a good personal relationship up front, where trust and expectations are aligned, leads to successful long-term relationships in the future. Such success is a benefit to the community and programming resources. Lorenzen also shared that when shared values and core competencies of the company and NGO are in sync, it leads to a greater value within the partnership.

MacDonald et al. (2019) shared that many organizations' leaders are being pressured to address issues faced within the community. Private, public, and civil society-based organizations are faced with establishing a strategy around multi-stakeholder partnerships to deal with some of the complex challenges in the communities they serve. They outlined one key challenge in differentiating the various types of partner involvement versus the resources the organizations seek to obtain because of the relationship.

Sampling

Aguinis and Glavas (2012) offered a view of the theoretical framework from both a multidisciplinary and multilevel perspective. They previewed mechanisms of CSR that outline the outcome of these relationships and contingent effects on the community. The researchers offered a future perspective on how to integrate diverse theoretical frameworks (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Austin and Seitanidi's (2012b) two-part review presented components of the collaborative value creation framework. They outlined the partnering process that shows the dynamics that result because of creative and collaborative outcomes and the costs and benefits on various levels. They showed where there is equal importance of value pertaining to environmental, social, and economic impacts, both long-term and short-term, for individuals, organizations, and communities.

Braun and Clarke (2006) presented an argument that while thematic analysis is rarely acknowledged, it is yet still a widely used qualitative analytic method within many disciplines. Braun and Clarke argued that it offers a theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data by offering guidelines to different epistemological and ontological positions for those seeking to start their thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke advocated that thematic analysis is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research.

Dworkin (2012) shared information regarding the sample size policy for qualitative studies when conducting interviews. Oftentimes less than the sample size used in quantitative studies, as qualitative research deals more with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Many argue that the sample size must reach saturation, ensuring that

the data collected have no new information or data relevant to the study. The varying factors surrounding saturation may be out of the researcher's control when interviewing participants.

Diener (2000) explored subjective well-being and how individuals evaluate their lives. Diener focused on how individuals' goals relate to their feelings of well-being in their communities and cultural influences. Diener used naturalistic experience sampling and methodological refinement to study subjective well-being and how it is used to produce happiness.

Etikan et al. (2016) studied and compared nonprobability sampling. They reviewed two main techniques, convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Because the research will not be used to generalize the entire population, a nonprobability sampling approach will be utilized in the research and interviews.

According to Guin (2011), it is important when doing qualitative research that validity is established. Utilizing a triangulation method will help to check and establish validity and review the research questions from different viewpoints. Graves and Waddock (2000) offered there can be a positive link between a firm's quality of management and its social performance. They ascertained that companies could see extraordinary performance from employees and stakeholder engagement when positive outcomes emerge from social responsibility in the community.

Baker and Edwards (2017) offered insight into the epistemological, methodological, and practical issues to consider when conducting research projects and determining how many participants need to be engaged when conducting a study. The

authors shared that the researcher must consider assessing research aims and objectives, validity within epistemic communities, and available time and resources of the participants when determining sample size.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review showed that several barriers prohibit NPOs and SB owners in South Fulton, Georgia, from establishing long-term partnerships. The research presented in the literature review addressed issues pertaining to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of resources for small businesses and NPOs, and the challenges faced when seeking to build relationships. Understanding that sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses prove vital in underserved communities, both entities continue to identify ways to build relationships. The literature consistently showed that NPOs often seek relationships with larger organizations in hopes of obtaining funding and sponsorship for community programming.

However, the gap in the literature does not sufficiently speak to the benefits of establishing similar relationships with small businesses where opportunities to assist with growth and development are just as viable. I pursued an understanding of the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. The outcome of the research findings presented solutions from discussions with nonprofit leaders and SB owners on how to connect and build together.

For the most part, the literature referenced how businesses and NPOs descriptively do (Rivera-Santos & Rufín, 2010; Simpson et al., 2011) and normatively

should partner (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Bryson et al., 2006) and on the consequences of such partnerships (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Laasonen et al., 2012; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). The gaps in the research are prevalent in the lack of information formally outlining partnerships between community NPOs and small businesses. In Chapter 3, I described the generic qualitative research method used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore the perceived barriers that keep local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. In this chapter, I outline the research design that I used in this study. I describe the intended participants and the process for participant selection and recruitment. I used the one-on-one interview technique and teleconferencing with semistructured interview questions to capture the unique perspectives, thoughts, and feelings of community nonprofit leaders and SB owners in South Fulton, Georgia. In this chapter, I outline the data collection and the data analysis plan outlined along with instruments that I used to generate the data necessary to answer the research questions. The strategies to enhance trustworthiness are described, and ethical considerations are explained to demonstrate the commitment to the best research practices.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was: : What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia?

The central phenomenon in this study was the lack of collaboration between NPO leaders and SB owners when entering partnering relationships. The research question was used to explore themes and contexts regarding the experiences of nonprofit leaders and SB owners. I used the one-on-one interview technique and teleconferencing with

semistructured interview questions to capture unique perspectives, thoughts, and feelings of community nonprofit leaders and SB owners.

The method I selected for this study was the generic qualitative research approach (see Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Sandelowski, 2000). Morse and Richards (2002) maintained that qualitative approaches are ideal for exploring topics in which there is little knowledge about complex situations, constructing themes, and obtaining new insight regarding a phenomenon, increasing understanding of the phenomenon. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argued that basic qualitative research is focused on meaning, understanding process, and purposeful sampling; also, data collection relies on interviews, observation, and documents. Cooper and Endacott (2007) defined the generic qualitative method as “studies that seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or perspective and worldview of the individuals involved” (p. 817). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted basic qualitative studies can be found throughout the disciplines and in applied fields of practice and are probably one of the most common forms of qualitative research found in education. Generic qualitative research is used when research is not guided in the form of one of the well-known or established qualitative approaches (Kahlke, 2014).

Creswell (2013) described five qualitative research approaches including: (a) narrative research, which focuses on exploring the life of an individual, developing stories, drawing from anthropology, literature, history, psychology, sociology, and humanities; (b) the phenomenological approach is focused on understanding the essence of an experience or used to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon this approach

draws from philosophy, psychology, and education; (c) grounded theory is used to focus on developing a theory in data from the field, interested in the views of participants, and draws from sociology; (d) ethnography is used to focus on describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group, focused on describing and interpreting the shared patterns of a shared group; and, (e) case study, which is used to focus on developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases, draws from psychology, law, political science, and medicine. Despite the differences in each approach, they have similar processes. They employ data collection, interviews, observations, documents, audio, and visual materials. Besides the five approaches described by Creswell (2013), Merriam and Tisdell (2015) added basic qualitative research, an approach that captures the design that incorporates similar processes among different traditions.

I used a basic qualitative research approach to discover and understand the phenomenon, process, perspective, and worldview of the study's participants. Morse and Richards (2002) maintained that the basic research design is ideal when little literature suggests that continued research would be beneficial to learn more about community nonprofit and SB partnership experiences. The generic research design is excellent for exploring topics where little is known and for opportunities to make new discoveries (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is vital to the data collection process. Since the researcher is the data collection instrument, acknowledging personal subjectivities is of vital importance to rigorous and valid research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The researcher must perform an ongoing assessment of their identity, positionality, and subjectivities, known as reflexivity, because it influences the construction of and relational contribution to meaning and interpretation throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During data collection and analysis, the researcher's ongoing reflexivity is essential to the trustworthiness of the research design. As the researcher for this study, I was a nonbiased nonprofit professional with extensive knowledge and lived experiences of NPO roles within the minority community. Keeping a research journal throughout the study supported my efforts in developing proper research habits related to actively engaging in research reflexivity. I also used the journal to reflect on personal thoughts throughout different points in the process to formulate ideas for changes to the research approach, and develop meaningful questions to ask peers, advisors, or committee members (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I committed to transparency and honesty and implemented the appropriate research tools such as bracketing and open coding, and triangulated data collection through in-depth interviews and information gathered in the literature review presented in Chapter 2 of this study. I asked the participants questions that allowed them to reflect on their experiences as nonprofit professionals. '

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population for this study included community nonprofit leaders and local SB owners in South Fulton, Georgia. I purposefully selected 20 participants, including 10 NPO community leaders and 10 SB owners who serve minority

communities. Etikan et al. (2016) defined *purposive sampling* as a technique used by the researcher when choosing a sample of subjects or units from any given population. This is a nonprobability method that I selected based on 'my ability to engage relative participants that suit the purpose of the study. Battaglia et al. (2008) explained that using a nonprobability sampling technique does not give a population of participants equal chances of being included. I believed this method was a better fit for the study 'because of my ability to choose participants by virtue of their knowledge and experience specifically. Dworkin (2012) explained that the varying factors surrounding saturation might be out of the researcher's control when interviewing participants. The participants selected were well-informed and proficient with a phenomenon of interest.

The inclusion criteria consisted of the following:

1. Adults aged 18 and over who identify as nonprofit leaders.
2. A leader who currently serves in a decision-making role in the organization.
3. Adults aged 18 and over who identify as SB owners in the city of South Fulton, Georgia.

The target population for the study was participants in community initiatives and activities who have lived experiences that speak to the barriers faced between partnerships. A random but purposeful anonymous sample of SB owners and NPO leaders who are members of the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce were asked to participate. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) shared that purposeful samples offer a greater understanding of how stakeholders' goals around partnership are affected by knowledge, motivation, and other organizational influences.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection tool for the study was in-depth interviews with NPO community leaders and SB owners. I developed a list of 12 interview questions (see Appendix A). To ensure interrater reliability, I enlisted the assistance of a SB owner and a nonprofit professional who reviewed the questions. Their feedback ensured the viability of the questions relative to the study. Stemler (2004) described interrater reliability as an agreement between individuals on a specific subject to identify a level of consensus. For this study, measurement estimates are most appropriate. With measurement estimates, it is anticipated that all information from participants should be used and considered (Linacre, 2002).

Muylaert et al. (2014) shared that narrative interviews are a resource in qualitative research that help provide information on the participants' subjective experiences. Xie et al. (2020) indicated that interviews could provide rich information and an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon. Data collection for this study included interviews with 18 participants selected from eligible small businesses listed with the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce and local NPOs. Instrumentation for this study involved me, interview questions, field notes, and participants. I was an instrument of this study because I interviewed the participants using semistructured interview questions to collect data for the study (see Appendix A). The interview questions were open-ended, followed by probing questions to allow participants to offer their personal experiences and opinions with specific questions for NPO community leaders, SB owners, and community stakeholders. For participation accuracy, the interviews were audio recorded.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In this study, I interviewed 18 participants, including eight SB owners and 10 area NPO leaders at which point, saturation was reached. Regarding SB owners, I used a publicly available list from the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce that included email addresses to contact SB owners for potential participation. I sent emails to 30 small businesses, and the first 10 of these to respond were contacted to schedule interviews. These first 30 small businesses were purposefully selected to vary the SB size, scope, and location within South Fulton.

Regarding NPOs, I followed a similar process. I researched the United Way of Greater Atlanta's website and developed a list of NPOs in the area. I emailed 30 eligible NPOs. These 30 were also purposefully selected to vary NPO size, scope, and location. I contacted the first 10 NPOs who responded and scheduled the interviews.

Following the initial recruitment invitation, since I had not obtained at least 20 participants (10 participants in each group), I resent the invitation 2 weeks later to engage more participants. Since I had not attained an adequate sample size, I selected additional SB owners and NPOs on the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce and United Way of Greater Atlanta's lists, respectively. This process continued until I achieved an adequate sample size with data saturation.

I explained that their participation is confidential. Once they agreed to participate, I worked with them to schedule a face-to-face or via Zoom meeting, depending on the participant's preference. They were also informed that they have the right to refuse to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. The

discussion regarding the participants' right to withdraw at any time from this study was ethically imperative.

A pool of potential participants was contacted through my university-issued email address. I sent a follow-up email regarding participation 2 weeks after the initial contact to candidates who had not responded. The email me and presented a background of the study, its purpose, and an invitation to participate in the study. If the candidate did not respond after a follow-up email, I chose another participant. Once a replacement participant had been identified and agreed to do the study, I emailed them a consent release form. The form had to be signed, returned to my university email with an "I consent" response before the interview, and reviewed at the individual interview. After the participants agreed and signed the informed consent, I scheduled interviews in person or via Zoom. All interviews were audio recorded, and notes with notes taken.

Data Analysis Plan

During fieldwork, making sense of the data begins by noting emergent patterns or themes while observing and interviewing. Then coding strategy commences with transcribing interviews in a Microsoft Word document. I replayed the recorded interviews and ensured the transcription contained a complete and accurate word-for-word written rendition of the questions and answers. The transcripts were organized with each question in regular font and each answer in italic font. I saved the interview data and secured them on a single hard drive password-protected to ensure the data protection procedure. I explained the data protection procedure to the participants to improve their confidence in my process.

The transcripts were transferred to NVivo to perform content analysis and assist with thematic development. I defined, found, and marked in the text the excerpts with relevant concepts, themes, events, examples, names, places, or dates, as described by Rubin and Rubin (2012). I coded all possible forms of nonprofit management, CSR, SB partnerships, community collaborations, and outcomes. Next, the codes were organized into themes that reflect the NPO or small business. The data set was then established with thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the type of thematic analysis for this research include codebook approaches to support the cultural competency for public administrators' theory. The rich information must answer the research questions and deliver participants' lived experiences.

Issues of Trustworthiness

For qualitative research, the researcher must affirm that the findings are faithful to participants' experiences and that the investigation has quality and rigor (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Quality and rigor concerns happen throughout the entire research process. To judge a qualitative study's quality, rigor, and credibility, Frey (2018) suggested the terminology of trustworthiness to assert why the findings and implications should be viewed as acceptable and worthy to the reader. Ensuring qualitative research's quality, trustworthiness, and credibility takes a relational approach to and stance on analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that a relational approach to research requires an open mind with a receptive sensibility to learn with and from the research. Validity and trustworthiness are commonly used to describe the processes to assess the rigor of qualitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers can use methods to help increase

the rigor, thus, the validity of their qualitative research. Establishing trustworthiness can be achieved through several means including (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility (internal validity) is the researcher's ability to take all the complexities in a study and patterns that are not easily explained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this research, the intended focus of the study is community NPOs and small businesses and their need to establish long-term partnerships for the benefit of the community. To report an accurate statement by those who have lived experiences, I sent the transcript to the interviewees to be transparent. During the final phase of the research, member checks and follow-up interviews will allow me to check any assumptions with participants in a meaningful collaboration for feedback and analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described member checks as a process of checking in with the participants to see what they think and feel about various aspects of the research about them.

Transferability

Transferability (external validity) is the idea of developing descriptive, context-relevant statements and using the different contextual factors of the study design for another study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using cultural competency for the public administrator framework allowed me to connect the collection and analysis methods of the study beyond the local context. By positioning this study within the literature of CSR, partnership theory, public policy, and administration, I discovered that partnerships

between community NPOs and small businesses should be addressed and reviewed uniquely.

Dependability

Dependability, like reliability, entails using a well-articulated rationale that the researcher can argue for a solid research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability strategies are the processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation that the research must explain when it changed. A way to ensure the research is dependable and valid is through triangulation. Triangulation involves using different methods, such as observation, documents, field notes, and individual interviews (Shento, 2004).

Community NPO leaders and SB owners' interviews, observations, and policy documents present various data sources that check against one another.

Confirmability

Confirmability is acknowledging and exploring how the researcher's biases and prejudices plan their interpretations of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Guion et al. (2011) outlined methodological triangulation as a method to utilize in qualitative study when conducting surveys, focus groups, or interviews. In qualitative research, to determine if the findings of a study are true and certain, validity must be established to reflect accuracy in a situation and certainty in the research findings as supported by evidence (Guion et al., 2011). Validity in this study was established by interviewing participants to reach the same or similar conclusion.

Ethical Procedures

The participants who met the criteria were NPO leaders and SB owners with experience with these types of partnerships within South Fulton, Georgia. All participants were free to participate regardless of race, cultural background, or religious beliefs. The following ethical concerns include recruitment, data collection, data management, and data protection. Before this study began, I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) confirming appropriate ethical standards in research.

The participants were protected from any pressure to participate in the study and were given enough information to make an informed decision to participate in the study. For example, the initial study invitation and participant screening guide (see Appendix A) were used to describe the study and the study's purpose in a way that is impartial and does not pressure the potential participant one way or the other. The consent form (see Appendix B) included a statement of confidentiality, benefits of the study, risk of the study, and discussion of the length of time of the interview approximately (60 minutes), the method of communication used, and the consent to audiotape the interview will be provided to all those participating. Discussions regarding early withdrawal were in place with potential participants prior to agreeing to participate in the study, and the consent form addressed early withdrawal explaining that the participant will not be treated differently for choosing to withdraw at any point.

Summary

I sought to answer the question regarding the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton,

Georgia. The general qualitative approach was most appropriate to help explore this study. This approach helped to understand the participants' lived experiences in NPO and SB partnerships. I discussed the research design, methodology, and instrument development for conducting this study. In this chapter, I focused on the population and the data instruments used to gather the data for the study. The research sample for this study consisted of 10 community nonprofit leaders and 10 SB owners in South Fulton, Georgia. These participants were selected from a list of qualified business owners through the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce and registered local NPOs. Qualitative data was collected using virtual interviews via zoom. Data analysis was conducted by utilizing the NVivo software. To report an accurate statement by those who have lived experiences, I sent the transcripts to all the interviewees for an optional review to be transparent. This step provided an additional opportunity to check information with participants in a meaningful collaboration for feedback and analysis. For confirmability, I utilized sharing codes and analysis for feedback through peer debriefing. In Chapter 4 I present research findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. An understanding of these barriers can result in insights into how stronger partnerships can be forged through changes in policies or programs, whether they are formal or informal. The study findings may include insights regarding ways that small businesses can have a long-term influence on community resources and improve sustainability in the future. Overall, the study findings can be used by small businesses and community NPOs to broker private policy decisions that can lead to sponsored partnering opportunities to raise funds and help address specific community causes.

I used a generic qualitative approach to answer the central research question: What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia? There were two groups of participants, including NPO leaders and SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia. Qualitative data were collected from 10 NPO leaders and eight small business owners using semistructured recorded virtual interviews and analyzed via Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the thematic data analysis. The key sections in this chapter are the setting, demographics, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

Setting

I conducted the interviews electronically via Zoom. I interviewed a total of 18 participants, 10 NPO leaders, and eight SB owners. At this number data saturation was attained, fulfilling the criteria described in Chapter 3. Attaining data saturation meant that there was adequate data to draw necessary conclusions and that any further data gathering would not have generated any value-added insights (Chitac, 2022; Saunders et al., 2018). I held virtual one-on-one semistructured interviews from my home via Zoom. The participants were equally in the comfort of their homes during the interviews. The study setting was at each person's home. This setting guaranteed minimal to no distractions, privacy, and confidentiality. All participants were sent the informed consent form via email, which I later read during each interview. I sent the informed consent form to every respondent, so they had time to review it prior to verbally agreeing to participate voluntarily in the interview. Upon consent from each participant, I audio-recorded the interview responses using the Zoom recording feature. At the time of this study, there were no acknowledged individual or organizational factors or conditions that influenced participants or their experiences that would have changed the interpretation of the research findings.

Demographics

The participants were 10 NPO leaders and eight SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia. NPO leaders were identified using alphanumeric codes NPO1 to NP10 while SB owners were by alphanumeric codes SB01 to SB08. Six of the NPO leaders were female while four were male. Six of the SB owners were male while the remaining two were

female. Some NPO leaders served as CEOs, others as presidents, directors, and executive directors. Two of the 10 NPO leaders were founders/cofounders of their respective NPOs. The sampled NPOs served in different industries, including urban farming, mentorship, procurement and development, social work, education, community welfare, awareness against human trafficking, education and employment, and youth empowerment. NPO leaders primarily used their entities as tools to help level the playing field for marginalized and underserved communities across the metro Atlanta, Georgia. The sampled small businesses equally included diverse industries, including human resources, managing consulting, real estate, transportation, medical care, sports apparel, and hospitality.

At the time of data collection, NPO leaders had served their entities between 1 and 35 years. NPO1 was a cofounder and CEO of an urban farming NPO, with 15 to 20 years of nonprofit experience. NPO2 was the CEO of a mentorship NPO, with 1 to 5 years of nonprofit experience. NPO3 was the president of a procurement and development NPO, with 30 to 35 years of nonprofit experience. NPO4 was the director of a social work NPO, with 10 to 15 years of nonprofit experience. NPO6 was the CEO of an education based NPO, with 20 to 25 years of nonprofit experience. NPO10 was the CEO of a youth empowerment NPO, with 25 to 30 years of nonprofit experience. The other NPO leaders opted not to detail the number of years they have operated in their respective positions in NPOs.

SB owners had operated their respective enterprises for 1 to 35 years. At the time of the interviews, SB 01 had operated a human resources-oriented small organization for

20 to 25 years. SB 02 had owned and operated a small management consulting enterprise for 15 to 20 years. SB 03 had owned and operated a small real estate business for 15 to 20 years. SB 04 had owned and operated a small school transportation business for 5 to 10 years. SB 05 had owned and operated a small medical care enterprise for 1 to 5 years. SB 06 had owned and operated a small sports apparel business for 30 to 35 years. Lastly, SB 07 and SB 08 had owned and operated small hospitality businesses for 5 to 10 years and 25 to 30 years, respectively. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic information and characteristics that are relevant to the current study, including their alphanumeric codes, gender, role, and industry.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant code	Gender	Role	Industry	Years of experience
NPO1	Male	Co-Founder/CEO	Urban farming	15–20
NOP2	Male	President/CEO	Mentorship Procurement & development	1–5
NPO3	Female	President	Social work	30–35
NPO4	Female	Director Executive	Education	10–15
NPO5	Female	director	Education	N/A
NPO6	Female	CEO	Education	20–25
NPO7	Male	Executive	Community welfare	N/A
NPO8	Male	Founder/CEO	Human trafficking	N/A
NPO9	Female	Director	Education & employment	N/A
NOP10	Female	CEO	Youth empowerment	25–30
SB 01	Male	SB owner	Human resources Management	20–25
SB 02	Male	SB owner	consulting	15–20
SB 03	Male	SB owner	Real estate School	15–20
SB 04	Female	SB owner	transportation	5–10
SB 05	Male	SB owner	Medical care	1–5
SB 06	Female	SB owner	Sports apparel	30–35
SB 07	Male	SB owner	Hospitality	5–10
SB 08	Male	SB owner	Hospitality	25–30

Data Collection

I began the data collection process after obtaining approval from Walden University IRB. After the IRB approval, I scrutinized the United Way of Greater Atlanta's website and developed a list of NPOs in the area. I obtained email addresses for those NPOs and sent an invitation email to 30 eligible NPOs. These 30 were purposefully selected to vary NPO size, scope, and location. I contacted the first 10 NPOs who responded to schedule the interviews. Regarding the SB owners, I used a publicly available list from the South Fulton Chamber of Commerce that comprised email addresses to contact SB owners for potential participation. I sent an invitation email to the area SB owners. I intended to purposefully select the first 30 small businesses to vary in SB size, scope, and location within South Fulton. Only eight SB owners responded to the study invitation email. I contacted these eight SB owners to schedule the interviews. Following the recruitment and selection, I conducted semistructured interviews with 18 participants, 10 NPO leaders, and eight SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia, which was the number when data saturation was attained. Data collection lasted between July 2023 and October 2023.

I held virtual one-on-one semistructured interviews from my home via Zoom. I developed a list of 12 open-ended questions, which guided the interviews. The semistructured interviews lasted between 13 and 48 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded using the Zoom recording feature and transcribed in verbatim using Rev Transcription. I transferred the transcripts for each participant from Rev Transcription to Microsoft Word files. After transcription, I played the recording of each of the 18 interviews to ensure that all distorted, misprinted, and unclear words were rectified. I saved recordings and transcripts on a password-protected file on my personal computer. I followed all the data-gathering guidelines described in Chapter 3. I emailed a copy of the interview transcript for their review within 7 days and asked them to reply with any edits. I also asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add or share about their experience with the barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton. There were no additions to the transcripts by any participants during the allocated time.

Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis in the study was a process of discovering, scrutinizing, organizing, and synthesizing interview data to answer the central research question and draw conclusions. The qualitative data included transcribed audiotaped recordings of semistructured interviews I held with 10 NPO leaders and eight SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia. I applied NVivo 14 to perform content analysis and assist with thematic development. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis: (a) familiarization of data, (b) development of code and coding procedure, (c) development

of themes, (d) review of themes, (e) finalization and definition of themes, and (f) generation of the report. After familiarizing myself with the 18 interview transcripts and transferring/importing them into NVivo 14, I created a new project, naming it “NP & Small Business Partnerships.” I employed the NVivo features to define, find, and mark in the text the excerpts with relevant concepts, themes, events, examples, names, places, or dates (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I coded all possible forms of nonprofit management, CSR, SB partnerships, community collaborations, and outcomes. I identified and developed the preliminary themes using both inductive and deductive strategies. For the inductive strategy, I based common codes and themes on the gathered data. For the deductive strategy, I identified predetermined codes, which materialized from the data based on existing literature. These preset codes formed the preliminary coding scheme that I applied at the start of the data coding stage. I added new codes to the preset codes based on the actual data. Table 2 shows the preliminary codes that I identified and developed during the second stage of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis.

Table 2 shows that 15 preliminary codes emerged from the initial analysis. The third step of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis involved formulating themes and categories. This involved developing themes from the initial codes shown in Table 2 that I used in answering the research question. I converted the preliminary codes that I considered relevant to the study into themes and categories. I combined related codes to form an overarching theme. The fourth stage of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis entailed the review of the developed themes. During this stage of thematic analysis, I revised the excerpts assigned to each theme to guarantee that they were

appropriately classified. I then compared the developed themes to ensure that they were reasonably diverse to authenticate different categorizations. I scrutinized each theme to make sure that it epitomized a different idea rather than multiple ideas, which would be presented uniquely. The fifth step involved the finalization and description of themes. During this phase, I compared themes to the central research question to ensure that each theme was instrumental in answering this research question.

I then substituted the tentative themes with prepositional expressions that elucidated their essence as answers to the central research question. The final stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic approach entailed the generation of a report of the results. The report was organized based on the central research question and its conforming themes. There were no discrepant cases. Table 3 summarizes the developed themes.

Table 2

Preliminary Codes

Preliminary code (Alphabetical order)	No. of participants contributing to the theme (<i>n</i> =18)	<i>n</i> of references to the code in the data
Absence of business owners	1	1
Corporate volunteering	6	11
Strategy	5	5
Covid-19 pandemic	17	65
Funding	1	2
Homelessness	1	2
Lack of time	1	1
Leadership	4	6
Mentoring	2	2
Representation	4	8
Scholarship	1	1
Social awareness	1	1
SWAT analysis	15	30

System design	3	4
Trickledown effect	8	14
Underserved communities		

Table 3

A Summary of Study Themes

Research question	Developed themes
What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton Georgia?	Inadequate funding Funding system design Lack of financial capacity among small businesses Divergent interests and uneven benefits Hard economic situations in the post COVID-19 period. Volunteering strategy Improved community well-being

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As described in Chapter 3, credibility (internal validity) is the researcher's ability to take all the complexities in a study and patterns that are not easily explained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The focus of this study was community NPOs and small businesses and their need to establish long-term partnerships for the benefit of the community. I implemented the credibility strategies described in Chapter 3. To report an accurate statement by those who have lived experiences, I established credibility through member checking by sending the transcripts and copies of the initial interpretation of the interviews to the participants/interviewees via email to inspect for correctness and resonance with their experiences and perceptions. During the final phase of the research,

I performed member checks and follow-up interviews, which allowed me to check any assumptions with participants in a meaningful collaboration for feedback and analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described member checks as a process of checking in with the participants to see what they think and feel about various aspects of the research about them.

The participants appraised the transcripts and my preliminary interpretations of their interviews and provided responses regarding the precision and truthfulness of the data. I gave the participants 2 weeks to make any reviews or edits to the transcripts as well as to the copies of my preliminary interpretation of the interviews. I further permitted the participants to withdraw any preliminary information they found inappropriate to this study. Minor reviews and changes were made by some of the participants. For the few who did not reply to the email after 2 weeks, their interview transcripts were included in the dataset as originally delivered. Undertaking member checking enabled me to establish and enhance the credibility of the data and therefore the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Transferability is the notion of developing descriptive, context-relevant statements and using the different contextual factors of the study design for another study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I established transferability by using an interview protocol, recording Zoom interviews correctly, transcribing the recorded interviews, member checking, and wide-ranging descriptions of the research methods and procedures. The wide-ranging descriptions of the study methods and procedures will allow other

researchers to replicate this study in other backgrounds and circumstances. I further established transferability by providing a thick description of the phenomenon I was exploring. I gathered the study data until I reached data saturation. Using cultural competency for the public administrator framework allowed me to connect the collection and analysis methods of the study beyond the local context. By positioning this study within the literature of CSR, partnership theory, public policy, and administration, considered that partnerships between community NPOs and small businesses should be addressed and reviewed uniquely.

Dependability

Dependability demands using a well-articulated rationale that the researcher can argue for a solid research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability strategies are the processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation that the research must explain when it changed. A way to ensure the research is dependable and valid is through triangulation. Triangulation involves using different methods, such as observation, documents, field notes, and individual interviews (Shento, 2004). I employed triangulation to establish the dependability of the data and outcomes of this study. The community NPO leaders and SB owners' interviews, observations, and policy documents presented various data sources, which I checked against one another.

I further established dependability for this research study by accurately documenting all study methods and processes. The applied generic qualitative research design was described expansively in Chapter 3. Documents contained in the appendices, encompassing the IRB Acceptance, informed consent, interview guide, and recruitment

email validate how the participants were recruited and chosen as well as how the data gathering, and analysis were undertaken. I developed an audit trail of the research methods and procedures, covering the data collection and analysis, results, and reporting to establish the dependability of this study. According to O’Kane et al. (2021), a qualitative researcher exhibits integrity by evading assumptions and prejudices as well as his or her desires and principles. I employed an audit trail to guarantee that the study process was correct and trustworthy and to avoid assumptions and prejudices. I reserved interview audio and video recordings, transcripts, and fields to enhance the dependability of the collected data. To further establish dependability, I utilized step-by-step practices of data collection and analysis. The stages of data gathering included inviting participants to the interviews through Zoom, recording each interview upon consent from participants, transcribing the recorded data, scrutinizing the collected data for inaccuracies, member checking, and triangulation. To analyze the gathered qualitative data, I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic approach: (a) familiarization of data, (b) development of code and coding procedure, (c) development of themes, (d) review of themes, (e) finalization and definition of themes, and (f) generation of the report. Following these step-by-step procedures enabled me to guarantee that this study is replicable and therefore establish its dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is acknowledging and exploring how the researcher’s biases and prejudices plan their interpretations of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Guion et al. (2011) outlined methodological triangulation as a method to utilize in qualitative studies

when conducting surveys, focus groups, or interviews. In qualitative research, to determine if the findings of a study are true and certain, validity must be established to reflect accuracy in a situation and certainty in the research findings as supported by evidence (Guion et al., 2011). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), confirmability is also the ability of a researcher to validate that the research data and data analysis reflect the participants' experiences and views. Confirmability demands the researcher to avoid his or her viewpoint and in lieu focus on the participants' accounts. For this generic qualitative study, I established confirmability in this study by interviewing participants to reach the same or similar conclusion. I minimized my bias as the researcher by only focusing on the data I gathered from the interviews. I requested clarifications of replies from the participants where necessary. I applied methodical documentation of the study methods and processes to provide a reference for others to follow. Coding was equally an important technique for establishing confirmability in this study. During the thematic analysis process, I reviewed the developing codes many times and classified them by comparable characteristics.

Results

The research question for this study was stated: What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia? Seven themes emerged from the thematic analysis relevant to answering this research question. The themes included inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, and uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, volunteering

strategy, and improved community well-being. These study themes are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes Applicable to Answering the Research Question

Theme	No. of participants contributing to the theme ($n=10$)	n of references to the theme in data
Theme 1: Inadequate funding	17	65
Theme 2: Funding system design	16	39
Theme 3: Lack of financial capacity	15	28
Theme 4: Divergent interests	7	24
Theme 5: Uneven benefits	5	8
Theme 6: Hard economic situations in post COVID-19 period	8	26
Theme 7: Volunteering strategy	6	11
Theme 8: Improved community well-being	18	53

Theme 1: Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding was largely quoted as a major barrier that hinders local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. This was the most prominent theme of the study as depicted by the number of participants contributing to it as well as by the number of references to the theme in the data in Table 4. Seventeen of the 18 participants contributed to the insufficient funding theme, with 65 references across all interviews. The theme of inadequate funding was particularly visible in the responses from NPO leaders.

All 10 NPO leaders indicated that a lack of capital is a major barrier to building sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia.

They considered that both NPOs and small businesses share a common problem of the lack of capital, which hinders them from creating sustainable partnerships. Due to experiencing it first-hand during their operations, some of the participants were particularly very passionate while speaking about the funding barrier. NPO3 for instance provided a thorough description and explanation of why inadequate funding is a key barrier to developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses in the region.

NPO3 stated,

Like small businesses, nonprofits experience the same things, when it comes to access to capital. Lack of capital is the number one hindrance. I see this in the African American communities because that's the one that I'm most familiar with. But access to capital is a major barrier.

Speaking as a president but not the founder of a nonprofit organization, NPO3 added that the lack of capital is more critical in NPOs that are administered by non-founders. The participant argued that founders will tend to support their ideas and hence finance their NPOs from their pockets. NPO3 specified:

I think one of the other barriers from a personal standpoint, which may or may not be true, but my personal observation is that a lot of things that we ran into in the nonprofit sector is territorialism. It almost felt like if it's not my idea, I'm not going to support it. There are those who get behind a cause they believe in and once they do, they throw their support in 100%. But then there are others that, again, as I said, if it's not their idea then they tend to not be as interested in

supporting. One of the other things that I've noticed in the nonprofit is your major corporations; they put their money behind major nonprofits, but not smaller ones.

NPO3 supported her claims by giving an example of the NPO she was representing. She was the president of an NPO that was founded by her sister. NPO3 shared that most of the NPO's funding came from the founder's for-profit corporation. She stated that,

The number one supporter was my sister's for-profit company, which basically funded all the monies that we gave away early on. There were some people who would give a thousand, 2,500, \$5,000, but when it came to the big monies and different things like that, we 'didn't get that.

These findings reveal that NPOs will predominantly partner with and get financing from the founders' other businesses. Other SB owners are unlikely to partner and support a nonprofit idea that is not theirs. NPO3 added the few businesses that finance the NPO she is representing end up withdrawing their support with no justifiable reasons. She mentioned,

I think that was part of it, but I also know that my sister is a very dominant type of personality, and that's why I wanted to verify earlier that this conversation is just the two of us. So, I think that she had many opportunities early on because early on those thousands, 25 hundred, 5,000, \$10,000, they added up. But then after a period, people just kind of stopped supporting us for whatever reason.

NPO8 equally indicated that NPOs are most likely to receive funding from their founders as compared to small businesses. Being the founder and CEO of a NPO that

creates awareness against human trafficking in South Fulton, Georgia, NPO8 financed the operations of his organization when there were no other available financing and resources. Consistent with the perceptions of NPO3, NPO8 perceived that partnerships between NPOs and small businesses depend on the organization and the individual. A founder of an NPO is likely to secure partnerships and funding with other organizations as compared to a president, CEO, director, or leader who is not the founder of that nonprofit firm. NPO8 noted,

When I was the coordinator, connecting with people was easy because I was in the position of having access to government resources for some organizations. Whether they looked at it as a partnership to help them gain funding or to help them access other critical resources needed in a short amount of time. Partnership is one of the key things in being successful in dealing with human trafficking because no one does this work alone. So, it is really about having access to these resources. Just recently, I had a victim with a three-year-old and we're trying to get her housing. She's a human trafficking slash domestic violence victim, and we're trying to get her housing, and it was very difficult and at that immediate time, we needed to get her a hotel. So, I reached out to some resources that I had that work in this space and was able to get her a hotel for a week. Now, if that resource wasn't there, then most likely I'd be spending money out of my own pocket, which again, is what the NPO, is aiming to be, this is what we want to do. We're not quite there yet, but when you're talking about partnerships, it's good to know your community in that space. So, if this particular organization wasn't

there, it would've been very difficult to try to find her spaces because there are limited resources when it comes to addressing the needs of human trafficking victims.

The interviews further revealed that NPO founders and owners are mainly absent from their entities and have presidents, CEOs, and directors to accomplish the nonprofit missions for them. Conversely, presidents, CEOs, and directors are unable to mobilize finances and undertake other functions as the NPO owners/founders would do. On her part, NPO3 is the president of a NPO that deals with procurement and development. Based on her experiences in this role, NPO3 argued that the absence of NPO founders or owners hinders the creation of sustainable partnerships with small businesses. One of the NPO leaders added that having insufficient financing means that NPOs are unable to employ high-ranking, competent administrators such as the CEO. Without such qualified high-ranking administrators, NPOs can hardly engage with small businesses for partnership.

SB owners equally viewed the lack of funding and capital as a key barrier hindering the creation of sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs. SB04 for instance whose business entails school transportation shared,

One of the big things is finances. Because in our experience, most programs have the funding to operate, however, since the pandemic, and the shift that had to happen, the funds need to be reallocated differently. In this instance, partnerships fall under what they really need. So, you can't have a program if the children can't get there, and they need us to get them there but expect us to donate the

services. So, then the challenge is they need us, but how is it that we can partner where everybody wins and not take too much of a loss on the for-profit side?

Two other SB owners similarly indicated that their enterprise is still very small and operates with venture capital. They argued venture capital is limited because as economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, people are cautious and hesitant about where they invest their money and resources.

Theme 2: Funding System Design

Funding system design was equally a dominant theme among the participants. Sixteen of the 18 participants contributed to this theme, with 39 references across the interviews. The participants noted that the current organizational system is designed in favor of large nonprofits and large corporations. Government funding goes first to large NPOs, which then trickle down the finances to small nonprofits and businesses. NPO1 stated,

First, I think it is the way that the system is designed. When I was a part of the Norris project through Cornell, I challenged the National Science Foundation to give the money to the neighborhoods. And what the National Science Foundation told us was that we were not ready to handle the type of money that they give out. So, we are not ready to handle that type of money. Well, why can't you equip us with the necessary tools or tutor us through the process? The system is designed to give the money to the large institution and the large institution is supposed to trickle that money down to us. But by the time it gets to us, it's not enough to sufficiently support local efforts. It's the same thing that happened with Cornell

Lab of Orthology. We get a very little piece of the pie, and we never can do all the necessary work in the community that we want to do.

According to NPO1, small nonprofits must prove themselves to get the required financing. The participant stated,

But yet still the system won't give me money to do what I do, but despite, we keep doing it anyway. We keep proving ourselves. We as a small nonprofit, must keep proving ourselves repeatedly and the system keeps telling us you're still not ready.

NPO5 also mentioned that large NPOs are favored over small nonprofits due to the existing system design. He stated,

I mean, I think that it's, I don't know what the word is "more glitzy" to do something at those established brick and mortar organizations, like a Boys and Girls Clubs, or a Big Brothers, Big Sisters, they have probably a corporate volunteerism staff person who focuses solely on those types of relationships. They've got their internal mechanisms on autopilot. So smaller organizations, we're stretched thin capacity-wise. It would benefit big businesses to learn more about what we do. In addition, we must do the training around applying for Federal Financial Aid (FFA). We're not asking you to come paint walls or do anything. Well, actually, a relatively small organization did come into the space and renovated our college access hub and they had about 40 volunteers, but that was me calling them. They weren't looking for us. I think a lot of times they go with the bigger NPOs that are already established to do a lot of that work. For

what our smaller nonprofits really needed, they ended up doing about \$30,000 worth of work in our space. And that was a huge relief for our budget. But again, we called them.

Theme 3: Lack of Financial Capacity among Small Businesses

The NPO leaders indicated that they do not partner with small businesses because these enterprises lack the financial capacity to support nonprofit work. Fifteen of the 18 participants noted that most small businesses in the region lacked the financial capacity to engage in sustainable partnerships with NPOs. Theme 3 was referenced 28 times across these 15 interviews. According to the NPO leaders, small businesses lacked sufficient budgets and finances to support not-for-profit work. NPO9 for instance shared that some of these small businesses are too small to be able to get into the realm of being partners with the NPO she represents as the director. When asked why the NPO she represents as the director does not partner with the local small businesses, NPO9 mentioned,

Sometimes their budgets cannot support, are able to support our work. We are a nonprofit. Our programs are free to our students, but we do charge the businesses a fee to bring everybody together. So sometimes they're just not able to support those fees.

These experiences were shared by NPO7 who stated,

Do you hold the classes or the technical support at nine o'clock in the morning or weekends or nights, or how do you leverage technology because the businesses are, some are start-ups, some are mid-range, but they normally are fighting to have the capacity and the owners of the business who you are providing the

services to are sometimes intricate into the operations of the day-to-day movement of the business. So, the challenges, are being flexible, being mindful of meeting businesses where they are, and being patient with businesses. It is not that they don't want to lean in, but sometimes they don't have the capacity to support them to lean in on the infrastructure. So, we are flexible and a bridge to the other sectors, the private sector, and the government sectors to help them to understand the challenges of small businesses.

NPO10 similarly perceived that a lack of financial capacity among small businesses is a key hindrance to their potential partnerships with the NPO she represents as the CEO. She stated,

I think that would be good for you in terms of just some of the smaller businesses that need some help. They don't have a whole lot of money, but they got some money to be able to pay at least one person and train them to do certain things in various areas.

Theme 4: Divergent Interests

The analysis revealed that another key obstacle that hinders local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia is the existence of divergent interests between NPOs and small businesses. Seven of the 18 participants, a blend of NPOs and SB leaders contributed to the divergent interests' theme, with 24 references across the interviews. The study showed that some small enterprises may not be interested in the resources and services provided by NPOs in the community. Other SB owners do not perceive the value of services offered by NPOs,

which discourages them from any form of partnership. NPO10 shared that the nonprofit she represents as the CEO addresses homelessness among young adults. Working with young adults is one of the reasons why her company is struggling to develop sustainable partnerships with small businesses because most business owners do not like working with this population.

NPO10 stated,

I think another challenge would be specifically with our population is educating partners and constituents about working with young people. And a lot of people don't like working with this population because of the age, ageism, and adultism around the stigma or stereotypes they have around.

NPO10 further thought that there is ignorance and lack of commitment among NPOs in asking for donations and assistance from small businesses. She stated,

But what I'm hearing as a theme amongst many from businesses to nonprofits is that no one ever asks. A lot of small businesses think that nonprofits just assume that they know that they're there and what they need. And oftentimes, unless it's somebody that you have a connection to, you don't know what the need is.

SB08, who is the owner of a small hospitality enterprise, added that some NPOs are not committed to their missions and hence they are unable to put donations to good use. He shared,

Over the years I've donated to various organizations, a lot of stuff is just, I wouldn't say it's mismanaged, but they're not really focused on what they're doing. They're good at asking, but they're not good at deploying the capital. That's just been my experience.

SB08 indicated that he now conducts thorough due diligence to ensure that he allocates finances to the right NPO and to where he can have some gains. +

SB08 stated,

So, for us, we just want to be able to get with folks that it's not a one-time thing. It could be a long-term strategy. We can share what we're doing with them to the community and it's a positive impact. And we can also gain traction in terms of new customers or our existing customers seeing us associated with things that they like.

The participants were in consensus that with divergent interests, goals, and missions, NPOs and small businesses can hardly engage in any sustainable partnerships.

Theme 5: Uneven Benefits

In addition to having divergent interests, hindering meaningful, sustainable partnerships, NPO leaders and SB owners had contrastive projections of how they would share the benefits generated from such partnerships. Five of the 18 participants contributed to this theme, with a total of 8 references. The analysis indicated that NPOs expect more from small businesses while providing less back. There are uneven benefits in the partnerships between small businesses and NPOs, with small businesses on the losing side.

SB06, who owns a sports apparel business, noted,

I'll give you a classic example. A church bought a plaque from us. I'm just using the church, but this goes to a lot of businesses. And so, the plaque was \$25, and then they turned around and asked us for a \$50 ad. So, they were like, we just did business with you. And I'm like, that math isn't mapping.

Some NPOs try to get free resources and funding from small businesses. SB07 supported this notion, indicating that.

There aren't too many disadvantages outside of just making sure you don't wear yourself too thin. A lot of organizations will just try to get as free out of you as they can. I hate to even say that, but it's just the truth.

Such divergent interests and uneven benefits hinder the establishment of long-term, sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs. This is because, in the long term, SB owners cannot continue with engagements and partnerships that do them no good. SB07 supported this idea, indicating:

And just being able to balance that with the monetary aspect too. Because as a business, if we're not making money then it doesn't do us any good to be giving stuff away. But there is good rapport within the community does sell to. Not that we do it for that, but it all comes around advertising. And then just being a strong partner helps bring a positive light to the company, which makes people want to buy from you more as well. So, there are more positives than negatives, but you just got to kind of watch how much you give out and not go broke trying to help everybody in the community.

To create long-term, sustainable partnerships SB07 advocated for a win-win engagement between small businesses and NPOs. He mentioned:

Like you said, making it a win-win for small businesses, kind of allocating resources on the front end so it doesn't feel as bad if you must turn somebody down, you already had a budget allocated for that. And not wearing yourself too

thin, but also not saying no to everybody. There is a benefit to being a community partner. And on the nonprofit side, just making sure your ask has a reciprocating benefit to the business as well, whether you're promoting the business, telling all your people in the organization about it, or even if, say you go half instead of making them do everything free, so they might still at least break even or something like that. But just figuring out ways to benefit the business as well. Particularly smaller businesses that don't have the budget to feed everybody, for lack of a better phrase.

Theme 6: Hard Economic Situation in the Post-COVID-19 Period

A key barrier to developing sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs is the hard economic situation as organizations and economies recover from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Eight participants contributed to this theme, referencing it 26 times in total. Small businesses have yet to fully recover from the financial damage incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NPO5 shared her experiences, indicating:

We had some partnerships that we were implementing as far as New York, but we're after the pandemic, just right now building back up, just decide if we still want to do that work. It was a lot of travel.

NPO6, who is the CEO of an education oriented NPO, also stated,

I can say we are building back up. It went down significantly during COVID. But in the years that you remember and maybe four years ago, we easily served 500 students a year. I expect that we'll be back there this year.

SB06 further shared,

I really think we have, because of COVID and all, it destroyed all the paths. It destroyed everything. I think we have the premise; we are on ground zero. We can start rebuilding things now. Things will never go back to where they were. And so now we must reinvent, especially now with this artificial intelligence. And everybody's so excited about that. I'm like; do you all realize how much is going to eliminate human purpose? But just I think, like I said, starting small, just getting the businesses together in our neighborhood. And we used to have a, before COVID, they had a Cascade coalition because now we have all types of restaurants. So, the restaurants could provide catering or it's a lot that we can do.

To cope with the current difficult economic situation, small businesses are cutting costs that are not directly beneficial to them. One of these reductions is scaling back the funding and services provided to local NPOs. SB01 shared these sentiments by stating:

That \$100,000 that we gave in 2021, we haven't been able to replicate that because we've had to hold onto that money because of COVID and the economic situation. So, I think things like that, and then what's happening in the economy really is causing corporations to take a stand back and cut expenditures that they don't deem essential to the business. And so, then that impacts nonprofits because they're dependent upon these corporations. So, either they're scaling back or so then that impacts their services that they're able to provide for the communities and have an impact. So, I think that's part of it. I think the other piece is you want to be able to have these multi-year partnerships where there's alignment or you

can see the benefit or it's helping drive that relationship with your organization.

So, you have to decide if you're going to do some type of in-kind.

Theme 7: Volunteering Strategy

The partnerships between local nonprofits and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia are mainly based on the volunteering strategy, which emerged as a barrier from the analysis. Six of the 18 participants contributed to the volunteering strategy theme, with 11 references across the interviews. The analysis showed that most SB owners and personnel volunteer themselves in NPOs instead of offering their support in monetary terms. The participants shared that this dependence on volunteers in NPOs results in a reduction in loyalty, commitment, and passion for the organization. NPO3 stated,

So many nonprofits operate based on volunteers, and I know that impacts the one, loyalty, commitment, and passion for the organization. I mean, since left, since I retired from my sister, I can't name how many people have been in and out of her organization. And it's all because they went in thinking one thing, and then once they got there, they realized that this is work. Really, if you want to make it successful, you must really be committed to the cause. You must be committed to the mission and vision of both the small business as well as the nonprofit.

NPO10 similarly mentioned that small businesses,

Don't have a whole lot of money, but they got some money to be able to pay at least one person and train them to do certain things in various areas. And then a lot of them look at it from, they want to volunteer. They're looking for organizations such as yours to get involved with.

Theme 8: Improved Community Well-being

The assessed NPO leaders revealed that their organizations partnered with small businesses, large corporations, and government entities to address different social needs. All 18 participants contributed to the improved community well-being theme, with 53 references across all interviews, making it the second most common theme after inadequate funding. Although these partnerships were hindered by the barriers, they were directed toward addressing various social needs in South Fulton, Georgia, leading to enhanced community well-being. NPO1 deals with urban farming, NPO2 with mentorship, NPO3 with procurement and development, NPO4 with social work, NPO5 and NPO6 with education, NPO7 with community welfare, NPO8 with human trafficking, NPO9 with education and employment, and NPO10 with homelessness among youth. Expanding on one non-profit as an example, NPO10 indicated that the NPO she represents as CEO enters into a mutually beneficial agreement with different businesses, including small firms to meet their mission of offering a solution to youth homelessness for young people, aged between 18 and 24 years who are aging out of Georgia's foster care program. Every NPO is engaged in social matters that improve the overall community well-being.

The non-profit activities were drawn from the introduction given by each NPO leader. In addition to these introductions, some of the participants noted in their interview responses that building sustainable partnerships between local nonprofits and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia can lead to improved community well-being. NPO2 for instance mentioned that a sustainable partnership between NPO leaders and SB

owners can bring economic growth, as well as job training and recruitment for better healthcare in the South Fulton community. He noted,

By bringing together nonprofit leaders in small business owners and South Fulton current community-based programming can be enhanced and more resources made available resources could be increased and improved upon over time through successful collaborations to bring economic growth development, job training, and increased recruitment for better healthcare. It is a collective responsibility of everyone in this community to play a role in helping to advance the well-being initiative. It is my hope that this study will not only present the current barriers as expressed by the participants but will result in viable solutions and strategies for building the types of partnerships necessary to see our community grow. So, with that being said, is there anything else you'd like to add?

The SB owners similarly viewed their partnerships with NPOs as an ideal way of improving the community well-being. SB06 for example shared that her sports apparel business has affiliated with local schools and league sports and recreation firms to guarantee that children have the correct sports kits to engage in different sports. SB06's enterprise has partnered with NPOs to address diverse social issues, including sex trafficking and exploitation and Sickle Cell disorder. SB06 stated,

My company's community involvement, partner with a lot of the neighboring schools. We are partners in education with the elementary schools, the middle schools, as well as the high schools. We also partner with the parks. Normally we

sponsor a couple of kids to play little league sports and recreation. One of the other things that we do, we are partnering this year with, well we've done it the last few years with a nonprofit organization that focuses on children being sex trafficked and exploited. We also work with another non-profit organization where monthly; we provide a meal for them on the fourth Monday of every month, we also work with a health oriented NPO as far as volunteering with them. Our level of involvement with them has kind of weaned a little bit because they've gotten a little larger and they have a bigger outreach. But those are the things that we're involved with now. But we focus mostly on the schools and mostly on the little league because that's where most of our money and business comes from.

SB07 likewise narrated that his SB which specializes in cupcakes, cakes, and coffee pastries, is involved in community well-being through sponsorships. When asked whether people from the local community come asking him to sponsor things, SB07 responded,

Yes, all the time. In fact, we got somebody asking us to sponsor 200 cupcakes, so we'll see if we'll do it or not. But yeah, we get requests for sponsorships all the time, which isn't a big deal. And we do a lot of stuff, or we do a lot of outreach ourselves as well. I remember when we first opened; we hosted a debate for the City of East Point, so we try to get involved in the city itself as well as nonprofits and the schools surrounding the area as well.

The participants further noted that partnerships between small businesses and NPOs are instrumental in improving the lives of people in marginalized and underserved communities in South Fulton, Georgia. NPO1 indicated that through urban farming, his nonprofit organization can enhance the lives of people living in marginalized and underserved communities across the metro Atlanta area. NPO1 further stated that his nonprofit played a key role in improving the lives of underserved people during the COVID-19 pandemic. He mentioned that “during the pandemic, I fed more than 25,000 families across the metro Atlanta area. Today, yesterday we fed about 75 families, and we do that consistently.” Other NPO leaders, particularly NPO2 and NPO5 agreed that developing good relationships and partnerships between nonprofits and small businesses is vital for the growth of a community. Such associations and partnerships are particularly essential in improving the lives of underserved communities.

Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceived barriers that hinder NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. A generic qualitative approach was used to answer the central research question: What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia? There were two groups of participants, including NPO leaders and SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia. Qualitative data were collected from 10 NPO leaders and eight SB owners using semistructured recorded virtual interviews and analyzed via Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the thematic data analysis. Seven themes emerged from the data. These themes included inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, and uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, volunteering strategy, and improved community well-being. The first six themes are the answers to the research question. The barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia include inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy. The findings further show that the partnerships that happen successfully between NPOs and small businesses lead to significant improvement in community well-being. Chapter 5 presents the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of the study, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceived barriers that hinder local NPOs and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia, to help meet the needs of the community. The central research question of this study was: What are the perceived barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia? There were two groups of participants, comprising NPO leaders and SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia. I collected qualitative data from 10 NPO leaders and eight SB owners using semistructured recorded virtual semistructured interviews and analyzed via Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. The research problem that I addressed through this study was the lack of sustainable partnerships between local NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia. There was little known research on partnership building between community SB owners and local NPOs (Lee, 2011). I conducted the study to help small businesses and community NPOs in the City of South Fulton, Georgia build relationships that create social change through shared collaborations, by identifying the perceived barriers to these associations. Through such relationships, small businesses, and community NPOs can broker private policy decisions that can lead to sponsored partnering opportunities to raise funds and help address specific community causes. My goal was to provide insights regarding ways that small businesses can have a long-term influence on community resources and improve sustainability in the future.

Eight themes emerged from Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. These themes included: inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, volunteering strategy, and improved community well-being. The first seven themes were the answers to the central research question. This research study includes empirical evidence that inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy, are the barriers that hinder local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. The eighth theme revealed that the partnerships that happen successfully between NPOs and small businesses lead to significant improvement in community well-being. In Chapter 5, I interpret these findings relative to the existing peer-reviewed literature and theoretical framework, describe the limitations of the study, give recommendations for further research and implications of the study, and provide a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

I found eight themes from my analysis: inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, volunteering strategy, and improved community well-being.

As noted in the literature review, there was not much empirical research that focuses on building partnerships between community SB owners and local NPOs (see

Lee, 2011). Accordingly, most of the findings in this study extend knowledge in sustainability research and discipline. Nonetheless, the few existing research studies in this field included evidence supporting the eight themes in this study. I used two models as the theoretical framework in this study: McQuaid's (2000) theory of partnership and the CSR framework. The interpretation begins with a description of these two models and how they help in explaining the findings followed by a comparison of the study outcomes and results from the peer-reviewed literature.

I used McQuaid's (2000) theory of partnership and the CSR framework to interpret the key themes of this study, which addressed the barriers to developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia. Partnership theory is an affiliating process that implies a commitment to working toward common objectives, a high level of mutual trust, a willingness to cooperate, shared responsibility, and accepting accountability, and, where necessary, to alter the prevailing institutional structures (Walsh, 2004). According to McQuaid (2000), partnership involves the development and delivery of a strategy or a set of projects or operations, although each participant may not be equally involved in all stages. I used these descriptions of McQuaid's (2000) theory of partnership to understand the issues participants presented as the barriers to establishing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. The barriers that emerged from the data analysis were inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy. Based on the tenets of McQuaid's (2000)

theory of partnership, I understood that these barriers were caused by a lack of commitment to work toward common objectives, a low level of mutual trust, an unwillingness to cooperate, a lack of shared responsibility, and failure to accept accountability. Particularly, Themes 4 and 5 indicate that NPOs expect more from small businesses while offering less in return. Subsequently, there are divergent interests and uneven benefits in the partnerships between small businesses and NPOs, with small businesses on the losing side. The interviewed SB owners highlighted that divergent interests and uneven benefits hamper the establishment of long-term, sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs.

CSR is described as the continuing commitment of businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, as well as the local community and society at large (Moir, 2001). I used this description to understand the findings on Theme 8, improved community well-being. I understood that partnerships between NPOs and small businesses help to enhance the community's well-being. The analysis showed that each of the evaluated nonprofit leaders is engaged in social matters that improve the overall community's well-being. It emerged from the data analysis that NPO1 deals with urban farming, NPO2 with mentorship, NPO3 with procurement and development, NPO4 with social work, NPO5 and NPO6 with education, NPO7 with community welfare, NPO8 with human trafficking, NPO9 with education and employment, and NPO10 with homelessness among youth. The following sections include discussions of how each of the eight themes relates to the existing peer-reviewed literature.

Theme 1: Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding was quoted as a key barrier that hinders local nonprofits and small businesses from building sustainable partnerships in South Fulton, Georgia. All 10 NPO leaders who were interviewed indicated that a lack of capital is a significant obstacle to building sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. They considered that both NPOs and small businesses share a common problem of the lack of capital and funding, which hinders them from creating sustainable partnerships. SB owners similarly considered the lack of funding and capital as a key obstacle hampering the creation of sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs. Findings by other researchers have similarly demonstrated that inadequate funding is a key obstacle to the development of partnerships between NPOs and small businesses (see Hargreaves et al., 2017; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Medley & Akan, 2008). Medley and Akan (2008) evaluated an assessment change model that helps leaders of NPOs take a closer look at challenges they face by way of decreased funding, loss of clients, and improvement in programming and outreach initiatives. These findings from the existing peer-reviewed literature validate Theme 1 of the current study, reaffirming that inadequate funding is a key barrier to building sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses.

Theme 2: Funding System Design

The analysis revealed that the existing organizational system is designed in favor of large nonprofits and large corporations. Government funding goes first to large NPOs, which then trickle down the finances to small nonprofits and businesses. Big NPOs are preferred over small nonprofits due to the existing system design. Small nonprofits must

prove themselves to get the required financing. The existing literature consistently shows that NPOs often seek relationships with larger organizations in hopes of obtaining funding and sponsorship for community programming (see Baur et al., 2012; Laville & Nyssens, 2001; Lorenzen, 2012). There is therefore satisfactory empirical evidence that the funding system is designed to favor partnerships between NPOs and large businesses, leaving minimal to no space for small businesses to establish similar collaborations with nonprofits.

Theme 3: Lack of Financial Capacity among Small Businesses

Satisfactory evidence emerged from the analysis suggesting that NPOs do not partner with small businesses because these enterprises lack the financial capacity to support nonprofit work. The participants underscored that most small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia lacked the financial capacity to engage in sustainable partnerships with NPOs. The NPO leaders particularly indicated that small businesses lacked adequate budgets and finances to support not-for-profit work. NPO9 for example shared that some of these small businesses are too small to be able to get into the realm of being partners with the NPO she represents as the director. A lack of financial capacity among small businesses therefore was identified as a major constraint to developing sustainable partnerships between these businesses and local NPOs. Findings by other researchers have consistently revealed the lack of financial capacity among small businesses as a substantial obstacle hindering the creation of sustainable partnerships between these businesses and local NPOs. Houterman (2013) determined that collaborations between for-profit and NPO collaborations are mired by barriers such as concern over the

financial ability of for-profit entities to maintain a long-term partnership and an NPO's overarching need for specific goods and services that may be of limitation to a small business. Based on these findings, Houterman (2013) suggested that for partnerships between for-profits and NPOs to be successful, they must first effectively communicate the needs and expectations, build trust, and commit to seeing the collaboration grow and meet the goals of not only the relationship but the community for long-term impact.

Theme 4: Divergent Interests

The existence of divergent interests between NPOs and small businesses was another key barrier emerging from the collected interview data. The analysis demonstrated that some small enterprise owners may not be interested in the resources and services provided by NPOs in the community. Other SB owners do not perceive the value of services offered by NPOs, which discourages them from any form of partnership. NPO10 indicated that the nonprofit she represents as the CEO addresses homelessness among young adults. Working with young adults is one of the reasons why her company is struggling to develop sustainable partnerships with small businesses because most business owners do not like working with this population. SB08, who owns a small hospitality enterprise, added that some NPOs are not committed to their missions and hence they are unable to put donations to good use. Overall, the respondents agreed that with divergent interests, objectives, and missions, NPOs and small businesses can hardly engage in any sustainable partnerships. Little is available in the existing peer-reviewed research to support divergent interests as barriers to forming sustainable

partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. This finding is primarily an extension of knowledge in sustainability business research.

Theme 5: Uneven Benefits

The analysis further revealed that the NPO leaders and SB owners have contrasting projections of how they would share the benefits generated from such engagements. The analysis demonstrated that NPOs expect more from small businesses while offering less in return. Consequently, there are uneven benefits in the partnerships between small businesses and NPOs, with small businesses on the losing side. The interviewed SB owners highlighted that divergent interests and uneven benefits hamper the establishment of long-term, sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs. This is because, in the long term, SB owners cannot continue with engagements and partnerships that do them no good. Lee (2011) evaluated practical challenges faced when developing small businesses and NPOs and found that partner goal orientations and expectations are areas that must be understood on the front end. Lee (2011) similarly found that NPOs expect more from small businesses while offering less in return. An earlier study by Kanter (1994) correspondingly showed that top NPO executives often devote time to screening potential partners more based on financial gain than the partnership in human terms. The researcher highlighted that this kind of perspective only lasts for as long as it takes the organization to reach the benchmark goal of the relationship. Kanter (1994) called it a “collaborative advantage” (pp. 96–108). According to Kanter (1994), creating long-term relationships allows for fruitful and sustainable collaborations to be established. These outcomes from the extant peer-reviewed literature

corroborate Theme 2 of the current study that the expectations of more benefits among NPOs hamper the creation of sustainable partnerships between non-profits and small businesses.

Theme 6: Hard Economic Situation in the Post-COVID-19 Period

The findings show evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed significantly to the lack of partnership between NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia. Specifically, the hard economic situation as organizations and economies recover from the consequences of the pandemic was found to be a barrier to the development of sustainable partnerships between small businesses and NPOs in the region. Eight participants contributed to this theme, referencing it 26 times in total. Small businesses have yet to fully recover from the financial damage incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewed SB owners indicated that to cope with the current difficult economic situation caused by the effects of COVID-19, small businesses are cutting costs that are not directly beneficial to them. One of these reductions is scaling back the funding and services provided to local NPOs. Consistently, Bell and McCambridge (2020) determined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light many of the accelerated issues NPO leaders faced. According to Bell and McCambridge (2020), while NPOs have been around for decades, their level of relevancy tends to fade in and out in many communities. Kalogiannidis (2020) presented an idea of the COVID-19 pandemic's general impact on small businesses. Due to the pandemic, the world witnessed the largest fall in the number of active small businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted the U.S. supply chain and global trade (Kalogiannidis,

2020). There is therefore sufficient empirical evidence showing that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected small businesses, employees, and how they do business changed the overall business policies facing economic imbalance, and further hindered partnerships between small enterprises and NPOs.

Theme 7: Volunteering Strategy

The analysis of interview data revealed that developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia is problematic because such associations are primarily based on the volunteering approach. According to the interviewed NPO leaders, most SB owners and personnel volunteer themselves in nonprofit entities and/or programs instead of offering their support in monetary terms. Due to the lack of adequate finances to support nonprofit firms and initiatives in the community, most SB owners and personnel volunteer at these nonprofit entities to offer services. The participants shared that this dependence on volunteers in NPOs results in a reduction in loyalty, commitment, and passion for the organization. This volunteering strategy emerged as a barrier to creating sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses because these volunteers do not continue offering free services in the long run but they do so just for a short period. None of the previous peer-reviewed studies have revealed volunteering strategy as a barrier to the establishment of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. Accordingly, this finding extends knowledge in sustainability research.

Theme 8: Improved Community Well-being

Apart from revealing the barriers, the current study provides evidence that partnerships that happen successfully between NPOs and small businesses result in significant improvement in community well-being. NPO leaders indicated that even though partnerships between nonprofits and small businesses are delayed by the aforesaid hurdles, such associations are meant to various social needs in South Fulton, Georgia, leading to enhanced community well-being. The analysis disclosed that each of the assessed NPOs is engaged in social matters that improve the overall community's well-being. NPO1 deals with urban farming, NPO2 with mentorship, NPO3 with procurement and development, NPO4 with social work, NPO5 and NPO6 with education, NPO7 with community welfare, NPO8 with human trafficking, NPO9 with education and employment, and NPO10 with homelessness among youth. Extending on one non-profit as an example, NPO10 highlighted that the NPO she represents as CEO enters into a mutually beneficial agreement with different businesses, including small firms to meet their mission of offering a solution to youth homelessness for young people, aged between 18 and 24 years who are aging out of Georgia's foster care program. These findings imply that if the above-discussed barriers to the development of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses were addressed, these associations would result in more boosts in the community's well-being.

Consistently, some of the NPO leaders noted in their interview responses that building sustainable partnerships between local nonprofits and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia can lead to improved community well-being. NPO2 for example

indicated that a sustainable partnership between NPO leaders and SB owners can bring economic growth, as well as job training and recruitment for better healthcare in the South Fulton community. The SB owners equally considered that partnering and cooperating with NPOs is an ideal approach to enhancing the community's well-being. For instance, SB06 revealed that her sports apparel business has affiliated with local schools and league sports and recreation firms to warranty that children have the correct sports kits to engage in different sports. The analysis also provided evidence that partnerships between NPOs and small businesses are instrumental in enhancing the lives of people in marginalized and underserved communities in South Fulton, Georgia. One of the NPO leaders indicated that through urban farming, his nonprofit organization can improve the lives of people living in marginalized and underserved communities across the metro Atlanta area. These findings are satisfactory empirical evidence showing that sustainable partnerships are essential for improving the community's well-being and more so the lives of people living in underserved communities.

Sustainability scholars similarly suggest that successful sustainable partnerships between community based NPOs and small businesses lead to the improvement in community well-being (Donahue, 2020; Kotler et al., 2012; Rademacher & Remus, 2017; Reilly, 2016; Shumate & O'Connor, 2010; Wright & Reames, 2020). Donahue (2020) indicated that NPOs and businesses can form successful partnerships, which are designed for community improvement. Kotler et al. (2012) indicated that small businesses might work with community NPOs to assist with improvements to social well-being through ongoing philanthropic donations, workforce volunteering, and job training. Reilly (2016)

similarly noted that partnerships between NPOs and small businesses are vital to a country's economic well-being and have nearly doubled in the last 30 years. Wright and Reames (2020) found that despite sporadic and often inadequate financial support, community based NPOs have assumed responsibility for many aspects of sustainable development, including residential weatherization, energy conservation, transportation, and the provision of housing and shelter to urban and rural communities. Accordingly, the findings of the current study provide support for earlier research, which signifies that partnerships between enterprises and local NPOs play an essential role in enhancing community well-being.

Limitations of the Study

While this study contributes new knowledge in sustainability research as well as sheds light on the barriers to the development of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia, it is vital to consider the methodological limitations of the study. One key limitation of this study was diverging findings due to engaging the two distinct groups of participants, including NPO leaders and SB owners. Although there were common issues, NPO leaders primarily shared unique issues different from those provided by SB owners, which they considered as barriers to developing sustainable partnerships between their nonprofit firms and small businesses. The contrary was true whereby the interviewed SB owners mainly shared barriers that were unique and different from those addressed by NPO leaders. Specifically, the barriers of inadequate funding, funding system design, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy were predominantly shared by the NPO

leaders. The interviewed SB owners on the other hand contributed more to shaping the barriers of divergent interests and uneven benefits.

Another limitation entailed the use of the qualitative research methodology and generic qualitative design, leading to low transferability of the findings. Only 18 participants, including 10 NPO leaders and eight SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia were interviewed. There is no evidence that the findings of this study apply to other populations, situations, scenarios, and times. Accordingly, the identified barriers to developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses only apply to South Fulton, Georgia. Despite the limitations, this study uncovered the key barriers to developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses, which is an area that has received minimal interest from previous scholars. The findings from this study contribute novel knowledge regarding the obstacles that need to be addressed for NPOs and small businesses to establish long-term, sustainable partnerships.

Recommendations

The current study's findings can inform future research in various ways. Before conducting this study, not much empirical research existed on the development of partnerships between community SB owners and local NPOs. The current study has contributed new knowledge by uncovering the barriers that hinder the creation of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. The specific barriers that have been identified include inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy. To further expand

empirical knowledge in this area of study, I recommend future researchers replicate this study in locations and contexts across Georgia and other states. This will help in developing a solid literature base on the barriers that hinder the formation of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses.

One of the limitations of this study was caused by the incorporation of two distinct groups of participants, including NPO leaders and SB owners. NPO leaders largely shared unique issues different from those provided by SB owners, which they considered as barriers to developing sustainable partnerships between their nonprofit firms and small businesses, and vice versa. Based on this limitation, further research is necessary to investigate NPO leaders and SB owners distinctively. Future scholars should investigate NPO leaders and SB owners separately since the current study has shown that these two groups of participants have unique issues, which they consider as the barriers to establishing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small for-profits. The other limitation was a lack of transferability of the findings to other contexts, locations, scenarios, and times due to the adoption of a qualitative methodology and generic research design as well as the assessment of a small sample of only 18 participants. I recommend other researchers to repeat this study using a quantitative methodology. Applying a quantitative research methodology will help in enhancing the generalizability of findings to other populations, situations, scenarios, and times.

Implications

The findings from this study have significant implications for community-based NPO leaders, SB owners and managers, and the local government of South Fulton,

Georgia. The study findings uncover that creating sustainable partnerships between local nonprofits and small businesses in South Fulton, Georgia can lead to improved community well-being. Such a sustainable partnership can further result in economic growth, as well as job training and recruitment for better healthcare in the South Fulton community. Based on these findings, community-based NPO leaders as well as SB owners and managers might find it useful to collaborate and establish partnerships with one another as a way of improving the community's well-being, facilitating job training and recruitment, and fostering economic growth. The local government of South Fulton, Georgia may find it crucial to eliminate system barriers that prevent the development of successful, long-term, sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses.

Theme 2 suggests that the prevailing organizational system is designed in favor of large nonprofits and large corporations. Government financing goes first to large NPOs, which then trickle down the finances to small nonprofits and businesses. Big NPOs are favored over small nonprofits due to the existing system design. Small nonprofits must prove themselves to get the required funding. South Fulton, Georgia administrators should eradicate these hurdles and hence create more prospects for NPOs and small businesses to establish sustainable partnerships. By working together in the pursuit of sustainable partnerships, NPO leaders, SB owners and managers, and the local government of South Fulton, Georgia, can improve community well-being, facilitate job training and recruitment, and foster economic growth, and hence drive broader social change.

Conclusion

The lived experiences and perspectives of NPO leaders and SB owners from South Fulton, Georgia have demonstrated that developing sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses is a daunting task due to several key barriers. These barriers comprise inadequate funding, funding system design, lack of financial capacity among small businesses, divergent interests, uneven benefits, the hard economic situation in the post-COVID-19 period, and volunteering strategy. The current study has contributed new knowledge by uncovering the barriers that hinder the creation of sustainable partnerships between NPOs and small businesses. The findings further showed that the partnerships that occur successfully between NPOs and small businesses lead to significant improvement in community well-being. These findings have noteworthy implications for community-based NPO leaders, SB owners and managers, and the local government of South Fulton, Georgia. Based on the study results, community-based NPO leaders as well as SB owners and managers may find it beneficial to collaborate and establish partnerships with one another as a way of improving the community's well-being, facilitating job training and recruitment, and fostering economic growth. By collaborating in the pursuit of sustainable partnerships, NPO leaders, SB owners and managers, and the local government of South Fulton, Georgia, can improve community well-being, facilitate job training and recruitment, foster economic growth, and hence drive larger social change. To further expand empirical knowledge in this area of study, future researchers should replicate this study in locations and contexts across Georgia and other states.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

The goal of the interview is to answer any questions, including:

1. Tell me about your career and career experiences.
2. What is your current role in the company or organization?
3. What do you believe is the company's current level of community involvement, and how has it impacted the area?
4. Tell me what you believe is the understanding of the types of programs your nonprofit organization offers in the community.
5. How would you describe the current working relationship with your most prominent corporate supporter?
6. What areas of volunteerism are encouraged internally for your employees?
7. What support do the local corporation and its staff provide to community initiatives?
8. What is the annual giving level of your organization?
9. What is the process for nonprofits to apply for funding support?
10. Does your level of support go beyond a one-time monetary donation, or is there an ongoing annual initiative in place?
11. How would you explain what you perceive as some challenges corporations face when considering a multi-year partnership with local nonprofits?
12. Do you believe the current level of involvement in your company's community is sufficient, and how could it improve?

Appendix B: Invitational Email for Recruitment

Dear Sir or Madam: (Personalized for each invitation),

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Tracye Bryant, and I am a doctoral student in the Ph.D. program in the School of Social Sciences at Walden University. I am completing a study on Community Nonprofit and Small Business Partnerships and their Impact on Community Well-being. My goal is to understand the barriers community nonprofits and small businesses face when establishing sustainable partnerships. Your participation in this study will help shape the narrative around best practices to help build stronger community relations in the future. Participation is confidential, and the researcher will keep the information collected secure.

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research study titled “Community Nonprofit and Small Business Partnerships: The Impact on Community Well-being.” This study will research the barriers that prevent these long-term partnerships in the City of South Fulton, Georgia. I am seeking participation from volunteers who are current small business owners in the City of South Fulton, Georgia, and individuals who serve in leadership roles in community nonprofits in this area. These individuals would be considered subject matter experts in these roles and can speak directly to the pros and cons of partnering relationships.

I have attached an informed consent form describing the study’s purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, risks and benefits, privacy, and further information. It’s important to describe the data collection process to potential participants and the expectation of participation.

The process will include:

- Complete a face-to-face or online platform interview via Zoom for approximately 60-90 minutes.
- Verify your complete interview transcript to ensure the researcher’s transcription is correct through email, which may take approximately 30-60 minutes.

If you would like to volunteer to participate in this study, please reply to this email within the next 10 days with the words “I consent.”

I will respond with further instructions after the expiration of the 10 days, which include the self-assessment completion and scheduling the interview with your preference of face-to-face or online platform, such as Zoom, google meets, etc. If you have any questions before consenting, you may contact me by replying to this email at **xxxxxx@waldenu.edu**, or by phone at **XXX-XXX-XXXX**. Please respond within the next 10 days, so the research data collection can begin. I look forward to speaking with you soon.